Class _____

Book _____

Copyright No. _____

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

3121 3
Y C

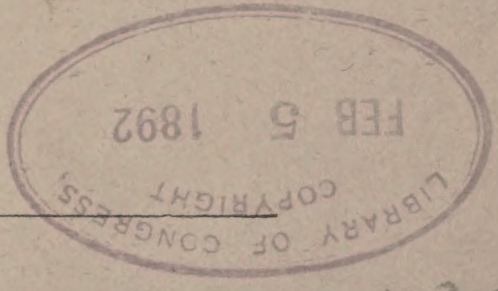
THE

PEER AND THE WOMAN

Edward

BY

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM



10324 X 2

NEW YORK
JOHN A. TAYLOR AND COMPANY
119 POTTER BUILDING

PZ3
.062Pee
copy 2

COPYRIGHT, 1892, BY
JOHN A. TAYLOR AND COMPANY

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
	PROLOGUE	5

BOOK I.

I.	—Lord Clanavon's Travelling Companion	19
II.	—A Bitter Welcome	22
III.	—God's Vengeance Would Be Too Slow	27
IV.	—The Inquest at Grosvenor Square	31
V.	—Wilful Murder Against Philip Neillson	38
VI.	—Marie de Feurget	42
VII.	—Face to Face with the Dead	47
VIII.	—Another Inquest and Another Verdict	52
IX.	—A Desperate Woman	63
X.	—In the Chamber of Death!	65
XI.	—Ghosts	68
XII.	—An East End Funeral	76
XIII.	—Her Last Visitor	80
XIV.	—Mother and Son	87
XV.	—The Reward Withdrawn	95
XVI.	—Mr. Brudnell's Advice	100
XVII.	—A Glimpse of the Past	105
XVIII.	—A Voice from the Cliffs	108
XIX.	—The Stranger	113
XX.	—Jim Doore's Story	118
XXI.	—Lord Alceston Is Puzzled	122
XXII.	—A Night Journey	125
XXIII.	—Mrs. Smith Is Warned	128
XXIV.	—The Chamber in the Tower: A Discovery	130
XXV.	—"Thank God that He Has Gone!"	139
XXVI.	—A Spring Door	144
XXVII.	—In the Bowels of the Earth	149
XXVIII.	—Alone with the Sea Gulls	154

CHAPTER PAGE
XXIX.—A Drama at Death 158
XXX.—Among the Waves 165

BOOK II.

I.—Marie de Feurget's Confidences; the Villa by the Mediterranean 169
II.—A Monotony Broken 174
III.—M. d'Aubron Is Disappointed 176
IV.—An Introduction 179
V.—Mr. Carlyon's Cousin 184
VI.—A Strange Conversation 186
VII.—A Vain Appeal 192
VIII.—A Fearful Secret. "What Shall We Do with It?" 195
IX.—Mad Moments 200
X.—Neillson's Dream 204
XI.—In Danger at Scotland Yard 210
XII.—A Woman and a Bracelet 214
XIII.—Lord Alceston Is Tempted 217
XIV.—Fire at the Convent 222
XV.—A Desperate Climb 224
XVI.—Sister Agnes 229
XVII.—Who Was the Woman? 232
XVIII.—A Journey 236
XIX.—M. de Feurget Desires a Son-in-Law . . 237
XX.—Neillson Is Suspicious 241
XXI.—M. d'Aubron at Bay 244
XXII.—The Beginning of the End: Risen from the Dead 250
XXIII.—The Duel on the Cliffs 252

THE PEER AND THE WOMAN.

PROLOGUE.

SIDE by side with his dignified, handsome wife, Lord Bernard Clanavon, Earl of Alceston, stood receiving his guests in the spacious corridor which led into the brilliantly-lit ball-room of his town mansion. It was getting on toward midnight, but the stream of arrivals was scarcely yet lessened, and the broad marble staircase, lined with banks of palms and sweet-smelling exotics, was still thronged with graceful women in marvellous costumes and flashing jewelry, and tall, distinguished-looking men, some in gorgeous uniforms, with crosses and orders glistening upon their breasts, a few in court dress, and fewer still in the ordinary evening garb of civilians. For it was the first function of any social importance of a season which promised to be an exceptionally brilliant one, and nobody who was anybody at all in the charmed circle of London society would have thought of missing it. And so they trooped up the crimson-druggeted stairs in incongruous array—statesmen and peers, learned men and poets, men of the world and men of letters, the former with, the latter in most cases without, their womenkind; and very few indeed passed on into the ball-room without receiving some graceful little speech of welcome from their courteous host or charming hostess.

A politician, a diplomatist, and the head of a noble family, Lord Alceston was a very well-known and popular leader of the world in which he lived. It would

have been strange, indeed, had he been other than popular. Look at him as he bends low over the plump little hand of the Duchess of M—— and welcomes her with a little speech which in one sentence contains an epigram and a compliment. His face possesses the rare combination of an essentially patrician type of features and distinct expressiveness. There is nothing cold about his light blue eyes or his small, firm mouth, although the former are clear and piercing as an eagle's, and about the latter there lurks not the slightest trace of that indecision which so often mars faces of that type. The streaks of gray in his coal-black hair seem only to lend him an added dignity, and the slight stoop of his high shoulders is more the stoop of the horseman or the student than the stoop of *gaucherie*—rather graceful than otherwise, for, notwithstanding it, he still towers head and shoulders over the majority of the guests whom he is welcoming. He looks what he certainly is—an aristocrat and a man of perfect breeding: the very prototype of an Englishman of high birth. So much for his appearance—and enough, for he will not long trouble the pages of this story. Of his wife it is not necessary here to say more than that she looks his wife. She, too, is handsome, dignified, and aristocratic, and if society admires and reverences Lord Alceston, it adores his wife.

At last the stream grows a little thinner. A great many have arrived in a body from a ducal dinner-party, and when these have made their bow and passed on through the curtained archway to where the Guard's band is playing the most delightful of Waldteufel's waltzes, there comes a lull. Her ladyship, closing her fan with a little snap, glances down the empty staircase and up at her husband. He stifles the very slightest of yawns, and, smiling apologetically, offers her his arm with a courtesy which, but for his charm of manner, might have seemed a trifle elaborate.

"I think that we might venture now," he remarked suavely. "You are a little fatigued, I fear."

She shrugged her white shoulders, flashing with

diamonds, and laid her delicate little fingers upon his coat sleeve.

"A mere trifle. Whatever does Neillson want here, I wonder?"

Lord Alceston paused, and, turning round, faced a tall, grave-looking servant, in a suit of sober black, who was advancing slowly toward him, making his way through the throng of liveried footmen who lined the staircase. He carried a small silver salver in his hand, upon which reposed a single note.

"Is that anything important, Neillson?" asked his master, frowning slightly.

"I believe so, my lord," the man answered apologetically, "or I would not have taken the liberty of bringing it now. The bearer declined to wait for an answer."

During the commencement of his servant's speech Lord Alceston's eyes had rested idly upon the superscription of the note which lay before him. Before its conclusion, however, a remarkable change had taken place in his manner. He made no movement, nor did he ask any question. He simply stood quite still, as though turned to stone, holding his breath even, gazing steadfastly down at the one line of address on the note. It seemed to have fascinated him; he did not even put out his hand to take it from the salver until Neillson reminded him of it again.

"Will your lordship take the note?" he said in a low tone.

Lord Alceston stretched out his hand and took it after a momentary hesitation, which was very much like an involuntary shiver. Directly his fingers had closed upon it he seemed himself again.

He looked swiftly around to see that no one had observed his passing agitation, and was satisfied. The footmen standing in line were still absorbed, partly in their duties, partly in the contemplation of their calves. His wife had been struggling with a refractory bracelet, which she had only just adjusted. Neillson alone had been in a position to notice anything unusual.

"You did quite right, Neillson. You will excuse me

for one moment ?" he added, turning to the Countess. "This despatch may possibly require my immediate attention."

She bowed her head languidly, and, sinking down upon a settee, recommenced fanning herself. Lord Alceston moved a little on one side, crushing up the note which he had taken from the salver in his slim, delicate fingers. For a moment he hesitated, and seemed inclined to destroy it unopened. The impulse, however, passed away, and, standing back behind some tall palms, which half-concealed him from his wife, he tore it nervously open.

Whatever the contents might have been they could have consisted of only a very few words, for he seemed to master them at a glance. But he did not immediately return to his wife's side. He stood there for more than a minute, with his back turned to her and the little troop of servants, and a very strange look in his face. One hand was pressed close to his side as though to ease some pain there, and the fingers of the other were locked around the half sheet of note paper which he had just received, crumpling it up into a scarcely recognizable mass. He had all the appearance of a man who has received a blow which for the moment has withered up all his faculties. His features were still impassive, but his face had a cold, numbed look, and all the light had died out of his eyes, leaving them glassy and dim. For a brief while he stood as motionless as a statue; then suddenly he shivered like a man awakening from a hideous nightmare, and moved his hand quickly from his side to his cold, damp forehead.

Lady Alceston, who could only see his back, and that imperfectly, began to wonder what was the matter. She rose and walked slowly over toward him. The sound of her rustling skirts trailing over the thick, soft carpet seemed to suddenly recall him from his abstracted state. He turned round slowly and faced her.

"It is necessary for me to write an answer to this note," he remarked quietly. "If my absence for a few min-

utes is observed, you will be able to make some excuse for me. The matter is really an important one."

She raised her eyebrows, but was too well bred to evince much surprise, or even curiosity.

"From Downing Street?" she inquired, nonchalantly. "I didn't notice the seal."

"Yes; from Downing Street," he answered. "It may take me some little time to answer, but you may rely upon my being as expeditious as possible."

She turned away with a slight inclination of the head, and, leaving him, entered the ball-room. He moved forward and gravely held the curtain open for her, taking it from the hand of a servant who was stationed there; then he retraced his steps, and, leaving the anteroom by a private door, passed down a flight of stairs, through another door, and along a passage until he reached the apartment on the ground-floor which he called his study.

It was a great room, finely proportioned and handsomely furnished, lined with books from floor to ceiling—a worthy study even for Lord Alceston, scholar, author, and politician. He paced across the thick, dark carpet like a man in a dream, with fixed gaze and slow movements, and sank into a chair in front of a black ebony writing-table strewn with letters, and piles of correspondence, and blue-books. For a moment he sat bolt upright, gazing into vacancy, or rather at the thick crimson curtains which hung before him, then suddenly his head dropped upon his folded arms and remained buried there for nearly a quarter of an hour. When he looked up his face was scarred and lined, as though with some swift, terrible trouble—as though he were passing through some fierce ordeal.

He poured himself a glass of water from a carafe which stood at his elbow and drank it slowly. Then he set the empty glass down, and, leaning forward in his chair, pressed the knob of an electric bell in the wall opposite to him.

Almost immediately there was a soft knock at the door, and his servant Neillson appeared.

Lord Alceston looked at him fixedly, as though seeking to discover something in the man's face. If he had hoped to do so, however, he was disappointed, for it remained absolutely impassive. The only expression discernible was one of respectful attention. His master withdrew his searching gaze with a slight movement of impatience, and gave his orders with his eyes fixed upon the table before him.

"Get my ulster from my room, Neillson, and fetch me a hansom—to the mews door, of course."

"Very good, my lord."

Neillson was a perfectly trained servant, but he had not been able to conceal a slight start of surprise. Lord Alceston noticed it and frowned.

"Neillson," he said, "you will remember what I told you when you entered my service?"

The man bowed. "I do, my lord. I was to be surprised at no orders which you might give me and never to repeat them."

Lord Alceston nodded. "Very good; remember to obey them in the present instance."

"I shall do so, my lord." The door closed, and Lord Alceston was left alone for a minute. He looked carefully around, as though to assure himself of the fact, for the reading-lamp upon his desk was heavily shaded and was quite insufficient to dispel the gloom which hung about the vast room. Suddenly he rose and walked with swift silent footsteps to the furthermost corner, in which stood a black oak chest with old-fashioned brass rings. He paused to listen for a moment—there was no sign of Neillson's return. Then he drew a bunch of keys from his pocket, opened one of the lower drawers, and, pushing his hand back to the remote corner, felt about for a moment. Apparently he found what he wanted, for suddenly he withdrew his hand, transferred some object to his pocket and returned to his seat. Almost immediately Neillson reappeared, carrying the ulster under his arm.

"The hansom is at the mews door, my lord," he said, holding up the coat.

Lord Alceston rose and suffered himself to be helped into it.

"Very good. You fetched it yourself, I hope?"

"Certainly, my lord. Is there anything else?"

His master buttoned his coat up to his ears, and drawing a slouch cap from the pocket, pulled it over his forehead. Then he hesitated for a moment.

"No, there is nothing else at present, Neillson," he answered slowly. "I shall lock this door, and if I am inquired for you can let it be understood that I am engaged upon an important despatch."

The man bowed and withdrew. Lord Alceston, drawing out his key from his pocket, followed him to the door and carefully locked it on the inside. Then, recrossing the room, he drew aside a Japanese screen and unlocked a small green baize door, which closed after him with a spring. He was then in a long dark passage, along which he passed rapidly until he emerged into a quiet side street, at the corner of which a cab was waiting. Without waiting to speak to the man, he stepped quickly inside and pulled down the window. The driver opened his trap-door and looked down.

"Where to, sir?" he asked.

It was nearly half a minute before Lord Alceston answered. Then he gave the address with some hesitation, and in so low a tone that he had to repeat it. The man touched his hat, closed the trap-door, and drove off.

. . . . . .

Two hours had passed since Lord Alceston had left his wife's side, and he was back among his guests again. Certainly he was amply atoning for his brief desertion of them, for every one was declaring that he was one of the most charming of hosts. He seemed to be in all places at all times, and to be incapable of fatigue. Now he was the life and soul of a little group of gossiping politicians, now among a bevy of dowagers, telling a story which was just sufficiently risque to awaken their keen interest without making them feel bound to appear unnaturally prudish, and conse-

quently putting them all into a delightful temper. Now he was acting as his own master of ceremonies, and introducing exactly the right people to one another, and now he was walking through the mazes of a square dance with an old-fashioned stately dignity which many of the younger men envied. Wherever he went he seemed to drive gloom before him and to breathe gayety into the dullest of the dull. Even his wife watched him admiringly, and wished that he would always exert himself as he was doing then, for there were times, as she well knew, when he was but a nonchalant host. But to-night he was excelling himself: he was brilliant, dignified, and full of tact. She began to wonder, as she paced slowly through the rooms on the arm of a Grand Duke, and answered with sweet smiles but only partial attention his labored commonplaces, whether that note from Downing Street had brought any good news. Visions of her husband at the head of the Cabinet, and entertaining for his party, began to float before her eyes, and she gave herself up to them until the growing coolness of her companion's manner warned her to abandon dreaming for the present and devote herself to her duties. But she made a mental note to inquire of her husband respecting that note at her earliest opportunity.

At last the spacious rooms began to thin. Royalty had come and gone; the perfume of exotics was growing fainter and fainter and the fairy lights were growing dimmer and dimmer. Faster than before all the plagues of Egypt do London beauties fly before the daylight after a night's dancing, and the guests were departing in shoals before the faint gleams of approaching morning. At last their hour of release had come, and Lord Alceston sought his wife.

"I have a letter to write for the morning post," he remarked. "With your permission I will come to your room for a cup of tea in half an hour."

Lady Alceston, seeing that save for the servants they were alone, indulged in the luxury of a yawn before she answered:

"Do. I want to have a few minutes' talk. Don't be longer. Everything has gone off well, I think?"

"Thanks to your admirable arrangements yes, I think so," he answered courteously. And then, with the smile still lingering on his lips, he turned away and went to his library.

Apparently he soon forgot his wife's invitation, for the first thing he did was to order a cup of strong tea to be brought to him at once. Neillson laid it down by his side on the table, and was about to depart when his master called him back.

"Neillson, I've lost the key of the baize door somewhere this morning. Send down to Bellson's the locksmith, as soon as you think that he will be up, and have another one made."

"Very good, my lord. Shall you require me again?"

Lord Alceston drew out his watch and looked at it. It was four o'clock. He hesitated with it still in his hand.

"If I do not ring for you in half an hour you can go to bed," he decided.

The door closed, and Lord Alceston was left alone. For a moment or two he sipped his tea leisurely. Then, drawing some paper toward him, he commenced to write.

He had covered two sheets of note paper and had commenced the third when he suddenly ceased writing and started violently. Leaning forward he pressed the knob of the electric bell, and then, half fearfully, he turned slowly round and glanced across the room. Save for the heavily-shaded lamp which stood on his table it was still unilluminated, and the greater part of it was enveloped in shadow, for the closely-drawn curtains completely shut out the struggling daylight. Lord Alceston drew the shade from his lamp with fingers which trembled a little and held it high over his head while he looked searchingly around.

There was a soft knock at the door, and Neillson entered. Lord Alceston put down the lamp with an unmistakable gesture of relief.

"Neillson," he said, quietly, "there is some one in the room."

Neillson looked around and then back at his master incredulously.

"Some one in the room, my lord!" he repeated. "Impossible! I beg your lordship's pardon," he added confusedly, "I meant——"

"Never mind what you meant, Neillson," interrupted his master. "Look behind that screen."

Neillson approached the screen very gingerly and peered around it.

"There's no one there, my lord," he declared, with relief. Side by side they walked round the apartment, Lord Alceston holding the lamp above his head. They discovered nothing. Obviously, save themselves there was no one else in the room. Lord Alceston resumed his seat and set the lamp down.

"It's a very strange thing," he said, in a low tone. "I'm not a nervous man, and my hearing is remarkably good. I could have sworn that I heard a shuffling footstep. Neillson, fetch my revolver from my room, and see that all the chambers are loaded."

Neillson withdrew, and during his brief absence Lord Alceston sat round in his chair with his eyes restlessly wandering about the interior of the apartment. Presently Neillson reappeared and silently laid a small shining revolver on the desk by his master's side.

"Anything further, your lordship?"

"No, you can go to bed now! I suppose it must have been fancy. Just see, though, whether the baize door is securely locked."

Neillson crossed the room and tried it.

"It is locked, your lordship," he declared.

"Very good; you can go."

The door closed, and Lord Alceston, after one more furtive glance around, slowly finished his tea, drew the revolver close to his side and recommenced writing. He had barely finished another page, however, before his pen suddenly stopped upon the paper and his heart gave a great throb. Again he heard, this time without

the possibility of any mistake, and close behind him, that low, stealthy sound. He dropped his pen and stretched out his shaking fingers for the revolver; but even when his hand had closed upon it he could not turn round. A cold horror seemed to have stolen over him, freezing his blood and numbing his limbs. All his sensations were those of a man in a hideous nightmare; but this was no nightmare.

Again came the stealthy sound of a cat-like tread close to his chair. A hot breath upon his neck, and then, as life flowed suddenly again into his veins, and he strove to cry out, a handkerchief was pressed into his open mouth and he felt his senses reel before the swift, deadly influence of the chloroform with which it was soaked. Still he struggled for a moment, half turned round in his chair, and caught a glimpse of a pair of burning eyes fixed upon his, and read murder in them.

"You!" he gasped. "You!"

One arm seized his, and held them from behind. A swift gleam of blue steel flashed before his eyes; a sudden pain. It was over in a moment.

. . . . . .

There was a brisk sale for the evening papers on the following day. All down the Strand and round Trafalgar Square the eager newsboys were shouting out their terrible tidings, and for the lover of sensation there was very good value indeed in exchange for his penny. Placards leaned against the walls, were spread out upon the pavement, and were almost thrust into the faces of the ever-hurrying throngs of passers-by, and this is what they announced:

AWFUL MURDER
OF THE
EARL OF ALCESTON!

and a little lower down—

ANOTHER TERRIBLE MURDER IN THE EAST END!

An immense sensation was created this morning in all circles by the rumor, which has unhappily proved too

true, that the Earl of Alceston had been found at an early hour this morning in his library with his throat cut and quite dead. On inquiry at Grosvenor Square this morning, our representative was put in possession of such facts as are already known. Briefly, they are as follows:

It seems that during the holding of a reception and ball last night Lord Alceston received a letter, the origin of which is at present a mystery, which compelled him to absent himself for some considerable period from his guests. Later on in the evening, however, he rejoined them, and it was universally remarked that his lordship had never appeared in better health or spirits. Nothing further happened, or has since happened, to connect the receipt of this letter with the fearful crime which we have to report. After the departure of his guests, his lordship went straight to his library, promising to join his wife and take tea with her in half an hour. All we have been able to gather of what subsequently occurred is, that about nine o'clock this morning, as she had seen nothing of her husband, and had not heard him go to his room, Lady Alceston sent her maid to make inquiries. She went in company with a footman at once to the library, and, being unable to procure admission or to obtain any reply, summoned help, with the result that the door was forced open and the terrible spectacle disclosed of Lord Alceston leaning forward on the writing-table, with his clothes and face covered with blood and his throat cut completely round from side to side.

Athough we are not at liberty, for obvious reasons, to state more at present, we understand that further startling disclosures have been made to the police by members of the household, but that at present there is no clue to the murderer.

1.30 P.M.—His late lordship's valet, Philip Neillson, is believed to have absconded, not having been seen or heard of this morning.

2 P.M.—A warrant has been issued for the arrest of the man Neillson on suspicion of having been concerned in the murder of his master, the Earl of Alceston. The accused has not yet been found.

4 P.M.—It is now ascertained beyond doubt that Neillson has absconded. The police are making every effort to trace him, and are confident of success.

The deceased earl was the third son of Lord Rupert Clanavon, Earl of Alceston, from whom he inherited the title and estates, and was the sixth peer. During his youth

he held a commission in the Second Life Guards and served with distinction through the Crimean campaign. On the death of his two elder brothers, however, his lordship left the army, and, taking his seat in the House of Peers, devoted himself to politics. His lordship was created a K. C. B. in 18—, was a member of the Privy Council, and quite recently his name was mentioned as the probable successor to Lord H—— in the Cabinet. The deceased peer was married in 18— to the Lady Margaret Agnes Montand, only daughter of the Earl of Montand, and leaves an only son, Lord Bernard Clanavon, who succeeds to the title and entailed estates.

Below, cast almost into insignificance by such a heinous crime as the murder of a peer of the realm, was a short paragraph headed:

ANOTHER TRAGEDY IN THE EAST END.
MURDER OF A WOMAN IN A LODGING-HOUSE.

Just before going to press information came to hand of another awful murder in Riddell Street, Bethnal Green Road. On being called, according to custom, by the proprietress of the lodging-house, a woman who went by the name of Mary Ward was discovered lying across her bed quite dead, and stabbed to the heart by some sharp instrument. The deceased woman was known to have been visited by three men during the early part of the night, the latter of whom left hurriedly, but no struggles or cries of any sort were heard, and no suspicion was entertained of foul play. It is not known whether any of the other lodgers will be able to identify or give any description of either of the men alleged to have visited the deceased. Failing this, it seems highly probable that this crime will be another addition to the long catalogue of undiscovered murders in this locality. We are not at present in a position to state definitely whether there is anything to justify the supposition that this most recent crime is by the same hand and for the same purpose as others committed in this neighborhood, as the police are maintaining a strict reticence in the matter.

And so for one night, at least, Londoners had plenty of horrors to gorge themselves upon and to discuss

eagerly in public-house and club, railway carriage and omnibus, restaurant and street corner. Two murders in one night, and both wrapped in mystery! What food for the sensation monger, what a fund of conversation for the general public—carmen in their public-houses, society at their clubs and social functions. Pleasure seekers, dining and supping at their favorite restaurants, were ready with their solemn expressions of horror and their more or less absurd theories. A million tongues were busy with this one subject, bandying backward and forward the name of the peer and the name of the woman. Truly there is fame in death!

. . . . . .

In his stately bedchamber, on snowy sheets, pillowed with lace, and strewn with flowers, his fine face white and rigid with the calm of death, lay Bernard, Lord Alceston, Earl of Harrowdean; and on a coarse straw mattress, barely covered over by a ragged, none too clean, coverlet, in a Bethnal Green lodging-house, lay the woman who had called herself Mary Ward. For him there were mourners, at least in name, and loud in lament—for her there were none. But, after all, what did it matter? Around him, as around her, the great world of London revolved without change in its mighty cycles of vice and misery, pleasure-seeking and fortune-spending, and if more voices were lowered at his name than hers, more tears dropped over his damask sheets than over her ragged coverlet, what matter? Whose was the profit?

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

LORD CLANAVON'S TRAVELLING COMPANION.

"'Pon my word you're a very amusing fellow."

The person addressed flushed slightly as though offended by the patronizing tone in which these words were carelessly spoken. But his annoyance, if indeed he felt any, was evidently short-lived, for he answered back readily enough, with a little laugh:

"Glad you think so; very glad. It isn't every day, you see, that a poor fellow like me has the chance of amusing a milord—especially an English one."

"Milord" arched his eyebrows, and not having detected the faint tinge of sarcasm in the other's tone, put this remark down to pure snobbishness. So he withdrew a little further into the corner of the comfortable first-class railway carriage, of which the two men were the only occupants, and remained silent for a few moments, idly strumming upon the window panes with his fingers.

"How did you know my name?" he asked, abruptly, turning again toward his fellow-passenger.

"I didn't say that I did know it," was the reply. "I heard your servant call you 'my lord' on the boat, and there's a coronet on your bag there, unless my eyes deceive me, which they very seldom do. *Voila tout.*"

"Did you cross from Calais then? I didn't see you."

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"Very likely not. In fact, it would have been very strange if you had seen me, considering that I was in my cabin all the while."

"Sea-sick?" inquired "milord" contemptuously.

"Yes, sea-sick," was the unhesitating admission of his *vis-à-vis*. "I've never crossed yet without being sea-sick."

The frankness of the confession was not without its effect upon the person to whom it was made. "Milord," although he was a yachtsman and a born sailor, and had all a healthy young Englishman's contempt for effeminacy in any shape or form, smiled indulgently.

"Sorry for you. I was myself once, in the Bay of Biscay when I was eleven years old, and I haven't forgotten it. Deuced uncomfortable sensation it was."

The difference between these two men, whom chance had thus thrown together on their journey from Dover to Waterloo, was very marked indeed. "Milord" was a typical young British aristocrat, with long straight limbs, smooth, fair face, a little tanned by exposure to all sorts of weather; well-cut features, about which there hovered a slight vacuity of expression common among young men of the higher orders who have nothing particular to do with themselves, and which was perhaps a little heightened by the single eye-glass which obscured one of his clear blue eyes. He was dressed in a light check travelling suit, colored shirt, with a white silk tie, and a small bunch of Parma violets in his buttonhole. He wore no gloves, and his hands, though shapely, were hard and brown. A well-worn tobacco-pouch was open by his side, from which he had recently replenished the deeply-colored meerschaum pipe which he was smoking. Taken as a whole, his appearance was distinctly aristocratic, with a dash of the Bohemian. At any rate, no one could possibly have mistaken him for anything else but a gentleman.

His companion was a man of an altogether different stamp. His hair and mustache, once jet-black, were plentifully besprinkled with gray, and his small oval face was deeply lined. His features, though not striking, were refined and delicate, and his prominent forehead and deep clear eyes gave him somewhat the air

of a student, which, however, his restless, almost flippant, manner in a measure contradicted. His manners, indeed, were the least pleasing part about him—alternately nervous and inquisitive, labored and careless. He was ill, almost shabbily, dressed, and many little details about his person and *tout ensemble* were obnoxious to his more distinguished fellow-passenger. Still, he had told some funny stories and had made himself very amusing without attempting to be familiar, and Lord Clanavon, whom two things—railway travelling and his own company—always bored exceedingly, felt faintly grateful to this stranger of doubtful appearance for relieving the monotony of his journey, and decided to tolerate him for the brief remainder of it.

"You didn't come up from Paris, did you?" he inquired carelessly.

"Yes."

"And you were on the boat, too? Seems queer I didn't see you somewhere about."

"I was below most of the time on the boat," the other reminded him.

"Ah, yes. I suppose that was it. I thought I'd watched every one on board at Calais, too. There was a bit of a crush, though, and I must have missed you. Hallo! isn't that your ticket on the floor?" he added, pointing to it with his foot.

The other stooped forward quickly and picked it up. But Lord Clanavon's eyes were keen, and the ticket had fallen upon its back.

"Why didn't you book through from Paris?" he asked curiously. "That ticket's only from Dover, isn't it?"

"That's all. The fact is, I lost my ticket somewhere, and had to re-book from Dover. A nuisance, but it couldn't be helped."

There was a brief silence, during which Lord Clanavon yawned several times, and as his companion had ceased to be amusing, he picked up a sporting paper and studied it for a few minutes. Then the train ran into Waterloo, and he rose and stretched himself with an air of relief.

His fellow-passenger was the first to alight. Lord Clanavon returned his parting salute with a slightly condescending nod, then stepped out of the carriage himself, and, lighting a cigar, looked around for his servant. In a moment or two he came hurrying up.

"Bring out my traps and take them round to Grosvenor Square in a cab, Burdett," he ordered. "I shall walk. What the mischief's the matter with you?" he added, in an altered tone, looking hard into the man's face; "you look as though you'd seen a ghost."

"It's—nothing particular, my lord," Burdett answered, plunging into the carriage and busying himself folding up papers and collecting his master's belongings. "It was rather a rough passage, my lord, and I think it must have upset me a little."

Lord Clanavon, one of the most truthful young men in the world, accepted his servant's explanation at once, though he glanced again with some curiosity into his pale, averted face.

"I should have thought that you would have been used to it by now," he remarked. "There's some brandy in that flask on the seat. Help yourself, if you feel bad."

"Thank you, my lord," Burdett answered in a low tone; but instead of doing so he ceased for a moment in his task and watched his young master's retreating figure with tears in his eyes.

"I ought to have told him," he groaned; "but I daren't. Oh! poor Mr. Bernard! Whatever will he do when he knows!"

CHAPTER II.

A BITTER WELCOME.

Lord Bernard Clanavon was a young man who had earned for himself the reputation of extreme eccentricity. Even his father and mother, whose only and very much spoiled son he was, found themselves often forced to admit that he was odd. He had none of the vices,

and very few of the habits, of other young men of his class, which was all very well as far as it went; but it had its disadvantages. London life bored him, and the country, except during certain months of the year, was still less to his taste; consequently he spent a good deal of his time abroad; and, being difficult to suit in the matter of companionship, he spent most of it alone. Another of his peculiarities was that he detested having letters, and never, unless compelled, wrote them. To escape from a correspondence which, had his whereabouts been known, would have been inevitable, he made a point of never giving an address even to his own people, simply telling them the date of his return, to which he was always faithful.

A month ago he had left London for Rome, with the remark that he would return on June 15, and at four o'clock in the afternoon of that day he was strolling over Waterloo Bridge on his way westward. A little distance behind, on the opposite side of the road, followed his late travelling companion.

It was a fine afternoon, and the Strand was thronged with foot passengers and the streets with a ceaseless stream of vehicles. Lord Clanavon was evidently enjoying his walk. Head and shoulders taller than most of the crowd, he walked leisurely along, still smoking, and every now and then pausing to look in at a shop window or read the placards outside a theatre. The newsboys, who lined the gutters on the street, were making the air vibrate with their hideous news, but, partly on account of the great roar of traffic and partly owing to habitual inattention, he walked on serenely indifferent to their voluble cries. Close behind was his travelling companion, who watched him eagerly each time he passed one of the little knots of newspaper sellers, and whose face was gradually becoming savagely overcast. At last the blow fell. Close to Charing Cross Lord Clanavon paused with the evident intention of crossing the road, and as he stood on the curbstone waiting for an omnibus to pass, his eyes fell upon a placard which was thrust almost into his

face by an eager newsboy, and his ears were saluted at the same time by the cry which was echoing all down the Strand:

"Hawful tragedy in the West End! 'Orrible murder of the Earl of Harrowdean! Full particulars!"

For the space of fully thirty seconds Lord Clanavon stood perfectly still on the edge of the pathway as though turned into a figure of stone. Then a ghastly paleness crept into his cheeks, banishing all his ruddy manly color, and he swayed backward as though about to fall. The roar of the passing vehicles and the babel of talk and street shouts around seemed to come to him from a far-off distance, and the ground appeared to slide away from under his feet. Then came a darkness before his eyes, a sudden tightening of the brain, and at last unconsciousness. It was the first swoon of a man of iron nerves and constitution, and it was not to be forgotten.

. . . . . .

When Lord Clanavon opened his eyes and looked around him his first impressions were rather mixed ones. To begin with, he was lying upon a strange sofa in a strange room; and, more wonderful still, its only other occupant was a woman. He raised himself noiselessly upon his elbow and scrutinized his surroundings a little more carefully. The room was of moderate size and was well and tastefully furnished, though not luxuriously. This much a hasty glance showed him; then his eyes fell upon his companion and remained there. He was an artist by temperament, keenly appreciative of beauty in any form, and he felt a subtle sense of pleasure in letting his gaze rest upon her perfect oval face, with its dark blue, almost violet, eyes, and brilliant complexion and her dainty *petite* figure. For a moment or two he lay there watching her; then she looked up from the flowers which she was busy arranging and blushed slightly as her eyes met his.

"You are better?" she inquired softly, crossing the room and standing at his side.

"Better!" he repeated, wonderingly. "Have I been ill? Ah!"

A sudden wave of recollection came streaming in upon him, bringing with it a sickening sense of the horrible thing which had happened. Again he seemed to be in the noisy Strand, with that awful placard stretched out before him and the shrill cries of the eager newsboys ringing in his ears. This time, however, he withstood the shock and remained calm.

"Have you one of those papers?" he asked, rising slowly to his feet.

She put one into his outstretched hand unwillingly, and with a great compassion shining out of her luminous eyes.

"My father left one here for you," she said, softly. "He thought that it would be better for you to read all about it for yourself. I—I am so sorry."

He took it with trembling fingers, and, sinking down upon an ottoman, read it through. Then the paper fluttered down on to the floor and he covered his face with his hands for a few minutes. When he looked up again he was quite calm, but his voice was hard and his eyes dry and bright.

"Where am I?" he asked, looking around him.

"You are in my father's rooms in Craven Street," she answered. "You were taken ill and he brought you here."

"It was very good of him, very kind. Is he here?"

"He will be in a moment; you will wait and see him, won't you? I—I'm afraid you have had some very terrible news."

He pointed to the paragraph.

"Yes. He was my father."

"Your father! Oh, how dreadful! And you knew nothing about it?"

"Nothing. I came back this afternoon from abroad, and was on my way home."

The sight of his misery was awful. She turned away with a little sob and stood at the window with her handkerchief pressed to her eyes. She would have

liked to console him, but how was she to attempt it? A stranger, too! So she did what seemed to her the next best thing—she remained silent, asking no more questions.

After a while the necessity for action of some sort flashed in upon him. He rose suddenly and took up his hat.

"I must go now," he said, keeping his voice steady with an effort. "If your father has gone out, will you tell me his name that I may call and thank him for his kindness—and you for yours?" he added.

The words were conventional enough; the tone was a little more grateful even than the occasion seemed to demand. Perhaps she thought so, for she blushed faintly when she answered him.

"Our name is De Feurget, and—ah, that is my father's step, I think. He has returned then."

Lord Clanavon turned toward the door and saw a slight, dark figure standing upon the doorstep. Something familiar in the pale oval face and restless eyes arrested the words which he had been on the point of uttering. But it was not until Mr. de Feurget had advanced into the centre of the room that Lord Clanavon recognized his recent travelling companion. Then he held out his hand with a somewhat forced smile.

"I scarcely thought that we should meet again so soon," he said. "It was very good of you to bring me here; I don't know what would have become of me if you hadn't. I suppose I must have fainted," he added, as though rather ashamed of the fact.

"Such a shock is enough to make any man faint," the other added, gravely. "I trust that you are better now."

"Yes, I am better," Lord Clanavon answered, with a little shudder. "I was just going as you came in. Perhaps you will allow me to call again at some future time. Just now I don't feel up to much conversation, and I feel that I haven't thanked you and your daughter half enough for your kindness."

He had moved toward the open door, and from there

bowed his farewell to the young lady. Certainly she was very beautiful, he thought, as he looked into her dark brilliant face and saw the soft sympathetic light flashing in her deep blue eyes. And then he felt ashamed of himself for thinking of such a thing at such an awful time, and turned away a little abruptly.

M. de Feurget followed him downstairs and opened the door for him.

"Let me fetch you a hansom," he suggested. "You look scarcely fit to walk."

Lord Clanavon shook his head.

"I think that the walk will do me good," he said. "I couldn't breathe in a cab. Good-afternoon."

Then he turned away and walked slowly down the street with bowed head and eyes fixed upon the pavement. The man from whom he had parted remained upon the doorstep watching him with a curious look upon his face. His thin, colorless lips were parted in a slight smile, which was more suggestive of a sneer than of mirth, and his dark eyes had lost for a moment their shifty, restless expression and were full of deep thought. He stood here for fully five minutes after Lord Clanavon had disappeared, motionless and absorbed. Then some trifling noise in the street seemed to change the current of his thoughts, and he abruptly re-entered the house and closed the door.

CHAPTER III.

GOD'S VENGEANCE WOULD BE TOO SLOW.

THE idea of murder in the abstract has become so familiar to us from its frequent adaptation by the novelist and the columns of newspapers that it is rather difficult for an unimaginative person to realize its full horrors. To do so thoroughly we must picture to ourselves some one very near and dear to us suddenly snatched from our midst and hurried into eternity by such means. If we can do that we may be able to understand in some slight measure the agony of horri-

fied grief, succeeded by the burning desire for vengeance, which Bernard Clanavon felt as he slowly began to realize what had happened. It did more than make itself felt; it crept into his whole being like morphia let into an opened vein, and swept every other thought and impulse before it. The relations between him and his father had been exactly typical of the relations which exist between the majority of English fathers and English sons. There had been little or no sentiment, and outward expressions of affection had been very rare between them. Yet underneath the superficial crust of indifference there had been a strong and reciprocal affection, seldom manifesting itself in any more pronounced manner than by quiet cordiality, but still an existent and healthy feeling, which this hideous tragedy had fanned almost into a passion. And so, naturally enough, when the first shock of the interview was over, and the sight of her son had quieted a little his mother's grief, he withdrew himself from her embrace and asked the question which was burning within him:

"Is there any clue, mother? Do they know who has done—this thing?"

They were alone in Lady Alceston's boudoir, a small octagonal apartment hung with amber satin and furnished with all the soft luxury which perfect taste and unlimited wealth could devise. It was a room sacred to women—even Lord Alceston himself had seldom entered it—and Bernard Clanavon looked curiously out of place standing up erect among the low velvet-covered *fauteuils*, the delicate knick-knacks and softly-flashing mirrors, with a terribly fierce look upon his white sorrow-stricken face, and his eyes fixed upon his mother's bowed form full of a dry, burning light.

She withdrew her handkerchief from her face, and, looking up at him, shuddered.

"Bernard, don't look like that," she pleaded. "I would rather see you cry."

He turned his face away from her with a slight gesture of impatience, but its expression was unaltered.

"Crying is a woman's office, mother," he said in a low tone. "There is something else for a man to think about here. You have not answered my question."

"Neillson has disappeared," she said, slowly. "There is nothing else."

"Neillson! Neillson!" he repeated, half in wonderment, half in contempt. "Neillson guilty of—oh, that is all nonsense! I would as soon suspect myself."

"Nevertheless, he has disappeared," she repeated. "He was the last person who saw your father alive, and——"

"But it couldn't possibly have been Neillson," he interrupted firmly. "Why, a more simple-minded old fellow never breathed. You can't believe this yourself, mother."

The hand which clutched her handkerchief trembled violently, and she seemed to answer with great difficulty.

"I—I don't know. It is all so strange and horrible. Why should any one—oh, Bernard, Bernard, ask me no more questions!" she burst out, sobbing violently.

He waited until she was more composed, standing perfectly motionless, his fair, beardless face set and rigid and full of a terrible determination, looking, in the sweet subdued light thrown upon it by the tinted and heavily-shaded fairy lamps, like a piece of exquisite statuary.

"It was not Neillson," he said, quietly, when at last his mother removed the handkerchief from her eyes. "The utter absence of motive alone would make such an idea absurd."

She seemed still struggling with her agitation, but she answered him.

"Bernard," she said, "I cannot discuss this with you. The—the inquest is to-morrow. Wait till then."

Her evident pain seemed to touch him, for he stooped down and kissed her. Then he moved toward the door.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

He paused on the threshold.

"To Mr. Brudnell's office and then to Scotland Yard, to see what is being done."

She turned away from him with a gesture of horror.

"Bernard," she cried, passionately, "it seems to me that grief is second in your thoughts to vengeance!"

He shook his head.

"It's the difference between a man's grief and a woman's, mother, that's all. Yours is passive, racking your body and filling your thoughts and remaining there. Mine is a grief which calls out for action of some sort—for vengeance."

She stood up with her hand stretched out toward him, beautiful still, for all her gray hair and her marble-white countenance—beautiful in her perfect features and the solemn majesty of her attitude and gesture.

"Bernard," she cried, "'vengeance belongs to God and not to man! He himself has said it. I command you to desist from the purpose which you have in your heart, which is written in your face."

There was something intensely dramatic in the quickly-spoken words and in her sudden transformation from a weeping, sorrowful woman to a dignified queen of tragedy, with all the fire of command ringing in her passionate words. But she might as well have cried to the walls.

"I am your son, mother, and in anything else I would obey you. But I was his son, too! God's vengeance would be too slow for me," he added, bitterly.

Then he left her, and in a moment she was a broken-hearted woman again, sobbing wildly among the soft cushions of her low chair and talking to herself in broken tones.

"My God, my God," she moaned, "what shall I do—oh, what shall I do?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE INQUEST AT GROSVENOR SQUARE.

An inquest on the body of a peer of the realm is not an every-day occurrence. The coroner, who sat at the head of the long mahogany table, looked a shade graver and more impressed with the solemnity of his office than usual, and the same feeling was reflected in the solid-looking faces of his twelve subordinates as they were marshalled to their seats. Many of them had served on a jury before, but never in connection with such a sensational case, and there was a certain sense of ponderous satisfaction upon their faces as they drew close up to the table, almost as though they felt something akin to pleasure in the notoriety which their office would bring them. But there was genuine sympathy among them, notwithstanding, and more than one cast a pitying glance at Lord Clanavon, who sat a little apart in a high-backed oak chair.

It was a gloomy scene. Apart from the inevitable solemnity of it, the surroundings were in themselves depressing. Outside a thick, yellow fog had settled down upon the squares and streets—a penetrating fog which defied the drawn venetian blinds and heavily-draped curtain, and which hung about in a little mist around the circular glass globes and impregnated the whole atmosphere of the long room, which was at no time one of the most cheerful. It certainly could not have been said that the countenances of the twelve men, or their surroundings, were in any way out of keeping with the dreary nature of their duty. Both were funereal.

The silence was broken at last by the coroner, who in a low tone formally introduced the jury to their duties. Then the first witness, William Rogers, was called, and a tall, liveried footman answered the summons and took up a respectful attitude before the table. The coroner commenced his examination at once.

"Your name is William Rogers?"

"Yes, sir."

"What position do you hold in the household?"

"First footman, sir."

"How long have you been in the service of your deceased master?"

"About three years."

"You were the first person to enter the library and discover your master's body, I believe?"

"I was, sir."

"You had better tell us how it was, and by whose orders you went there."

"Very good, sir. It was about seven o'clock in the morning when I was woke up by a knocking at my door. I sat up in bed at once and called out, 'Who's there?' Her ladyship's maid, Marie Richards, answered me. I can't remember her exact words, but she said as her ladyship had sent her to tell me to go down to the master's study at once and see why he had not come up to bed. I asked her why she did not go to Neillson, which was his lordship's own man, and she replied that she had been, but she couldn't wake him, which, knowing as Neillson, who used to share the same room with me, was a very heavy sleeper, I warn't surprised at. 'All right,' I sung out, 'I'll be down in a moment;' and I hurried into some clothes as fast as I could. When I got outside she was a-waiting on the landing for me quite impatient like, and we went down together. I knocked first at the study door several times, but there was no answer; so I told Marie that his lordship had very likely gone straight to his own room instead of going in to see her ladyship. I left her there and went up to see, but the room was quite empty and the bed had not been slept in. So I came down a little flurried like and told Marie to go and tell her ladyship and ask what we were to do. Her ladyship sent down at once that we were to get in the study somehow at once, even if we had to break open the door. So I sent Marie for Thomas, the under footman, and together we forced the door open."

The man paused for a moment as though to take

breath, and when he resumed it was in a low, awed tone. Low though it was, however, it was distinctly heard, for every one was holding his breath and listening in an intense hushed silence.

"The room was quite dark except for just one ray of light which was streaming in from the window, just where the curtains, which had been pulled together, didn't meet quite, and that single gleam of light just fell upon his lordship's face. Gentlemen, you must excuse—one moment, please. It was an awful sight!"

The man's voice was checked by something very much like a sob, and he shuddered. There was a slight murmur of sympathy, during which he mopped his damp forehead with a handkerchief and slowly recovered his composure. Presently he drew himself up to his former attitude and continued:

"I'm much obliged to you, gentlemen, for giving me breathing-time. If any one of you had seen the sight as I saw when that door fell in, you'd understand it making me feel a bit queer. I'll try and tell you what it was like. His lordship seemed to be all slouched down in his writing-chair, but his head was hanging right backward like, over the side a little, and was hanging down almost toward the ground. There was a great gap like between the neck and his chin, and as we stood there we could hear the slow drip, drip of the blood upon the floor; yet somehow it didn't seem as though he was dead, for his eyes were wide, staring open. Marie, she went off into hysterics something awful, and Thomas, he wur trembling so that he couldn't neither move nor nothing else. I felt mortal bad myself, but I went up and touched his hand and found that it was quite cold, and then I saw the three scratches and bruises on his cheek like finger-marks. I saw that he was dead at once, but I told Thomas to be off as quick as ever he could and fetch a doctor and a policeman. I stood near the door while he was gone, and then when the sergeant came and Dr. Benton they locked up the room. That's all, sir."

He ceased with an evident gesture of relief. He was

an unimaginative, phlegmatic man, of the very commonplace type of English men-servants, and without any particular affection for his master; but his share in this tragedy, as yet so recent, had been like a nightmare to him, and the recapitulation of it had agitated him strongly. They gave him a little time to recover himself before they asked him any questions. Then the coroner ceased taking notes and addressed him.

"Did you notice anything disarranged in the study—any signs of a struggle?"

"Yes, sir. There was something of the sort. The curtain hanging over his lordship's private door, which led out into Berkeley Street, was half torn down and a small table with some books on, between his lordship's desk and the door, was upset."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing else that I can remember, sir. The policeman and the gentleman from Scotland Yard they took possession of the room as soon as they arrived, and locked it up."

The usual number of irrelevant and utterly useless questions were asked by certain jurymen of an inquisitive turn of mind, to some of which the coroner listened with ill-concealed impatience. Then the witness was dismissed, and, well trained though his features were, his relief was manifest.

Marie Richards was called next. Her evidence simply corroborated that of her fellow-servant, and no questions were asked her. Then the Countess of Harrowdean was sent for, and after a little delay appeared.

To those who had known her before, her appearance was a shock. From head to foot she was clothed in the severest black, and a widow's cap concealed her light hair. The features which a week before would have been pronounced delicately moulded were now sharpened like the features of an overworked seamstress, and the ghastly blanched pallor of her complexion showed up with startling vividness the deep black rims under her sunken eyes. She was like a woman prematurely aged, stricken down in a single night, and an in-

voluntary murmur of compassion escaped from the lips of more than one of the little body of men as they stood up to receive her. Her bearing and figure were the sole remnants of her former self. She walked up the room, leaning upon her son's arm (he had left his place and met her at the door), with a calm dignity which her sorrow seemed only to have enhanced, and there was something almost majestic in the manner in which she sank slowly into the easy-chair provided for her and acknowledged slightly the coroner's respectful salutation.

He commenced his examination at once, after thanking her for her attendance and regretting its necessity.

"Can your ladyship tell us anything which happened during the evening of last Tuesday which will throw any light upon this melancholy event or afford any clue as to its perpetrator?" he asked.

"I am afraid not. I will tell you all that I know," she answered, in a low but perfectly clear tone. "During the evening, while we were receiving our guests, my husband had a note brought to him. I do not know where it was from, or what it was about, but its contents seemed to cause him some uneasiness."

"Pardon me," interrupted the coroner, "but who brought Lord Alceston this letter?"

"Neillson."

The jury exchanged significant glances. The coroner made a note and signed to her ladyship to proceed.

"He told me that an urgent matter—I understood him to say some official business—required his immediate attention, and that he would be compelled to leave me for a while. I went in to my guests, and he to his study. It was past one o'clock, nearly two hours, before he rejoined me. During the remainder of the evening he was in remarkably good spirits, and certainly did not seem to have anything on his mind. When all the people had gone he went back again to his study, promising to come into my room shortly and have some tea. I waited for him for some time, and then, as he did not come, I put on my dressing-gown

and dismissed my maid, as she seemed very tired. I must have gone to sleep then over the fire, for when I woke up it was getting daylight. I found that the tea tray had not been touched, and that my husband had evidently not been in. As he was very particular in keeping his promises, I was a little alarmed, and I rang for Marie and told her to go to Neillson's room and tell him to see where his master was. She came back saying she could not wake him. I sent her then to William, the head footman. Soon afterward she returned to say the library door was locked, and I told them to break it open. I heard this done and the commotion, and—and soon afterward they came and told me."

Every one was conscious of a certain sense of relief when she had finished. Her voice had never once trembled, and her dry eyes were bright and tearless. But there was something awfully unnatural in her slow, monotonous tone and in the repressive calmness of her manner. None would have been in the least surprised if she had burst out into a fit of the wildest hysterics at any moment. The coroner himself was nervous, but there were some questions which he felt bound to ask her.

"You saw or heard nothing of your husband's servant, Neillson, during the evening, after he brought that note?"

"Nothing."

"How long had he been in your husband's service?"

"More than twenty years."

"And had the relations between them always been cordial?"

"As far as I know."

"You know of no circumstance likely to have created any resentment on Neillson's part toward your husband?"

"None."

"Was Neillson a saving man? Was he fond of money, do you know?"

"I believe so. Yes, he was."

"I suppose you are not aware whether your husband had any money either on his person or in his desk on the night of his murder?"

Lady Alceston for the first time moved her position a little and lowered her eyes.

The change almost hid her from her son, who had resumed his seat on the opposite side of the room.

"Yes, I believe he had," she answered thoughtfully—"rather a considerable sum. I had reminded him that it was quarter-day, when we always pay some of the household accounts, and he had told me that he had been to the bank and drawn some money. This was during the afternoon."

"About how much would it amount to?"

"Between five and six hundred pounds."

"Where did Lord Alceston bank?"

"At the London and Westminster."

The coroner made a note. Several of the jury did the same. Then her ladysnip was very politely told that she was needed no longer, and on her son's arm she left the room. Out in the hall he turned round and faced her.

"Mother," he said quietly, "you know that Neillson is no more capable of doing this thing than I am. Why didn't you tell them so?"

"Because they did not ask me for my opinion—only for facts."

A shadow darkened his boyish, handsome face. He caught her hand with a sudden impulsive movement and forced her to look into his eyes. A vague uneasiness had laid hold of him. What did it mean, this unnatural repression, this indefinable something in his mother's manner which seemd to suggest a secret, some knowledge which neither he nor others shared? It was clear to him that the calmness of her manner and speech was forced and unreal. She was putting a great constraint upon herself. Why? Again he asked himself, what did it mean?

"Mother," he said in a low, agitated tone, bending close over her, and glancing first half fearfully around

to be sure that none else was lingering about in the hall, "you know something more than you told. Is it not so? Cannot you trust me? I must know."

She did not answer him, although her lips moved. Looking into her face, he saw what was coming, and passed his arm around her waist and held her up firmly. The ashen pallor drew the color even from her lips, and her breath came in short troubled gasps. She had fainted.

CHAPTER V.

WILFUL MURDER AGAINST PHILIP NEILLSON.

THE next witness summoned before the coroner was the doctor, whose evidence was short and to the point. He described the means by which the deceased had met with his death as a complete severance of the jugular vein by one sweeping cut. Only the sharpest of knives and the strongest of arms, he added impressively, could have succeeded in inflicting such a ghastly wound—the most ferocious he had ever seen. The bruises on the cheek he had no hesitation in saying were caused by the convulsive grasp of the murderer while in the act of performing the hideous deed.

The coroner asked him only three questions.

"Could the wound which you have been describing have been self-inflicted?"

"Not easily," was the emphatic answer. "Had the wound gone an inch further it would have been a physical impossibility."

"How long did it strike you that deceased had been dead after you were called in?"

"I examined him with a view of being able to answer that question. Scarcely more than two hours, I should think."

"Did you notice anything in the condition or disarrangement of the room which seemed to indicate any struggle between the murderer and the deceased?"

"Nothing. My idea is that the murderer stole quietly

up to the back of the deceased's chair, and, leaning over, placed his hand over his mouth, in which case the points of his fingers would just reach the bruised part of his face; and then, drawing his head back with a quick movement, cut his throat."

A little shudder passed round the table at this graphic description, which the witness had been illustrating by gestures and a sweeping cut of his own throat with the edge of his hand. The doctor looked a little surprised. He didn't understand such a feeling. To him the technical details of the affair were far more interesting than its ethical horrors. But then he was a specialist and had no imagination.

The next witness was the last of any consequence. James Armson was called, and the Scotland Yard detective entered the room closely followed by Lord Clanavon. The latter quietly resumed his old seat and turned at once eagerly to the detective, listening to every word he uttered with keen anxiety.

Lord Clanavon, who recognized the fact that upon this man's capabilities would depend chiefly his chances of discovering his father's murderer, was not altogether impressed by his appearance. But he changed his opinion somewhat after listening to the concise and yet guarded manner in which he gave his evidence.

"Will you tell us, Mr. Armson," the coroner asked, "the history of your connection with this case as far as it has gone?"

The detective bowed respectfully, and told the story in a professional manner.

"I was talking to P. C. Chopping at the corner of Belton Street about seven o'clock on the morning in question when a footman turned the corner of Grosvenor Square and came running toward us. He was very incoherent, but we gathered from him that a murder had been committed at his master's house, and that he was anxious for P. C. Chopping to proceed there at once. We all set off together, and he brought us here and into the library. Lord Alceston was lying in the chair exactly as described by a former witness. The

doctor and the witness Rogers were the only other occupants of the room. I immediately locked the door, and while the doctor was examining deceased I made an inspection of the room. My first discovery was that there was a secret door opening out into Burton Street, and that it was unlocked. I was also able to trace faint drops of blood between the door and the chair where the deceased man lay, which suggested to me that the murderer made his escape by that door, carrying in his hand the weapon which he had been using. Later on in the morning a milkman brought to Scotland Yard the pocket-handkerchief and knife now in possession of the coroner, which he picked up a few yards down the street."

The detective paused and waited while the articles he mentioned were produced and handed round. The handkerchief was a fine cambric one, but unmarked, and was soaked and clotted with blood. The knife was distinctly a curiosity. The blade was curved slightly in the shape of a scimiter, and was of exquisite steel, sharpened both sides, and with an edge as keen as a razor's. The handle was curiously shaped and carved, and was evidently of foreign workmanship. Altogether, as a piece of evidence, the milkman's find was a most important one.

The detective had little else to say of importance, and the other witnesses less. Then an adjournment was made to the library. No fresh discovery was made, but it became evident to all how easy the committal of the crime might have been, supposing it to have been accomplished according to the general theory. The lock of the secret door behind the screen opened noiselessly, and the edges of the door were cased in india-rubber. The carpet was thick and soft as velvet, and the distance from the termination of the screen to the chair in which Lord Alceston had been sitting was scarcely more than a dozen yards.

Two further points were cleared up. The first one was with regard to the key of the door behind the screen, which, it was ascertained, had been discovered

in the keyhole outside. The second was concerning the bank-notes which, according to Lady Alceston's evidence, the murdered man had in his possession. No trace was found of these, either on the person of the deceased or among his effects. The inference was obvious—they had been taken away by the murderer, and who but Neillson could have known that his master had such a sum in his possession?

The coroner and his jurymen returned to the dining-room and were left to themselves while they considered their verdict. Lord Clanavon, after a few minutes' hesitation, walking up and down the hall with his hands behind him, made his way into the servants' quarters and asked for Burdett.

"Do you remember how long Neillson has been here, and where he came from?" he asked.

"He's been here longer than I can remember, my lord," Burdett answered, promptly. "We've just been reckoning it up; and a nicer, quieter, steadier sort o' chap I never knew. We can't none of us believe that he's had anything to do with this," he added.

"Neither can I," Lord Clanavon answered. "I liked Neillson. Do you know where he was before he came here?"

Burdett shook his head. "It's a strange thing, my lord, but I never heard him mention it. He was a quiet sort of a man about his own affairs—wonderfully close."

"He had pretty good wages, I suppose?"

"He had a hundred and fifty a year, my lord, and Groves, the butler, says that he couldn't have spent the odd fifty. He was a saving man, although he wasn't what you could call mean."

Lord Clanavon returned to his own little apartment on the ground-floor, feeling a little more bewildered than ever. Just as he entered it the dining-room door opened, and he heard the verdict passed from one to another—

"Wilful murder against Philip Neillson."

CHAPTER VI.

MARIE DE FEURGET.

A REMARKABLY pretty young woman was doing her best to spoil an otherwise charming face by scowling at herself in a mirror. It was a very silly thing for her to do, very silly indeed, for the utter weariness and discontent which her tell-tale features betrayed was quite sufficient to leave its traces, if often indulged in, even upon so pert and young a face as hers. Perhaps the same idea occurred to her, or it might have been that some pleasing thought acted as a charm. At any rate, after five minutes' silent contemplation of herself, she suddenly withdrew from the mirror, sank into an easy-chair, and sat looking into vacancy, with a soft smile parting her lips and transfiguring her expression.

Presently a smooth-coated, brown *dachshund* rose slowly from the hearth-rug, lazily reared its two front paws upon her lap, and, wagging its tail in an insinuating manner, fixed a meditative gaze upon his young mistress. She commenced to caress him, mechanically at first, but the encouragement was sufficient. He leaped up with all the agility which his short limbs would permit and coiled himself in her lap.

She looked down at him reproachfully, and as though inclined to protest against such a liberty. But the soft brown eyes watching hers so anxiously disarmed her, and she changed her mind. She took him into her confidence instead. After all, better a dog to talk to than nobody.

"Tory," she said, shaking a forefinger at him, "that was very rude—very bad manners indeed. Don't you know that you ought to have been specially invited to come up in my lap before you took such a liberty? No; you needn't go," she added, patting his head softly. "Now you are here you may as well stay—for a little time, at least. Oh, Tory! Tory! How I wish you were a human being—even if you were only a girl—so that I might talk to you sensibly now and then. It

wouldn't be quite so *triste* then—and it is very *triste* indeed here sometimes, isn't it, Tory, all by myself with no one to talk to? Or, I wish—I wish—he would come again. Wasn't he handsome, Tory, and didn't he bear it bravely? Poor, poor fellow! I did so want to tell him how sorry I was for him, and I couldn't. Directly I wanted to speak it all went out of my head. How stupid he must have thought me, Tory! Do you think he did, sir? Why don't you say something? I wonder—I wonder what he was thinking about when I looked up and saw him watching me, before he had remembered about—that! I believe it was something nice—I do really, Tory. I wonder how I looked that morning! Let me see. I had my blue frock on—the one madame had made for me in Paris." She went off into a day-dream. Tory, evidently deeply relieved at the cessation of her monologue, curled himself up with a satisfied snort and went off to sleep. Poor beast! He ventured to add to the luxury of what he doubtless considered well-earned repose by a few gentle snores, and he paid the penalty. One of them happened to reach his mistress' ears, and distracted her attention from the sweet little day-dream. The result was lamentable. In less than a moment poor Tory lay on his back on the hearth-rug, with his paws convulsively striking the air, and with a confused sense of having reached the ground with a haste quite out of keeping with his usual slow movements.

"Nasty, unsympathetic brute!" exclaimed his mistress, shaking her skirts.

Tory felt hurt, and determined to maintain his dignity. He turned his back upon his mistress in an offended manner, and, trotting slowly off to the other side of the room, ensconced himself on an unoccupied cushion.

Meanwhile Tory's mistress had gone back to her day-dream, and she was absorbed in it. Perhaps she was a very sentimental young woman to allow her thoughts to become so much engrossed by a few minutes' chance interview with a complete stranger. And

yet there were excuses for her. She was only eighteen years old, and had just quitted a French convent, within whose narrow precincts the whole of her life had been spent. There had been no holiday for her, no visits to friends' houses, no gayety of any sort. The rules of the convent had not been strict enough to prohibit unrestrained conversation among the girls, and on the other hand were too strict to allow them to become acquainted with a single person outside its bounds. It was an ill training for a young girl, and now that comparative emancipation had come, no wonder that she looked back upon it almost with a shudder.

Even the sweetest of day-dreams is liable to interruptions. The interruption to hers came in the shape of a surprise. The door opened and her father entered suddenly.

She looked up at him in amazement. "*Mon père!* You up and dressed! How wrong of you that is! You will be ill again! I am sure you will."

He stood just inside the door, leaning heavily upon the back of a chair. His face was ghastly white, and drawn as though with illness; there were dark rims under his hollow, brilliant eyes, and his unshaven beard and ragged, unkempt hair added to the wildness of his appearance. When he spoke his breath came in short, quick gasps, and the long, bony fingers which rested on the chair-back were shaking nervously.

"I—I have been ill," he muttered dreamily. "I——"

"Ill! Of course you have! Can one not see that? Why have you risen, *mon père?* What would the doctor say?" she exclaimed, wringing her hands in a gesture of despair. Then she ran to his side, forced him into a chair, and closed the door before she would let him speak.

"What day is this?" he asked.

"Friday."

"Friday?" He put his hand to his forehead, and seemed trying to recall something. "Friday? There was a young man came here," he said doubtfully, "when——"

"Oh, yes," she answered, with a faint blush. "That was on Tuesday. You have been ill since then, you know."

He groaned heavily. "I began to think—that it might have been a dream," he muttered despairingly; "a vision of hell! A paper, Marie; quick! A paper!" he cried out wildly. "Give it me."

"A paper?" she repeated wonderingly.

"Ay, ay! You know! The paper he saw! The murder, you know! I want to read about it! Quick, girl!"

He stretched out his trembling fingers and snatched it from her. She had found the place, but he turned it hastily over, and after a little feverish search commenced reading in another part. She stood by his side, frightened, with the tears in her eyes. What could there be there to affect him like this? She could see his whole frame quivering with excitement and the perspiration standing out like drops of agony upon his hard, damp forehead. Then his head fell buried in his arms, and his frail body, wasted with recent illness, was shaken by great sobs.

"No dream!" he gasped. "No dream! God help me!"

She fell on her knees by his side, caught hold of his hands, kissed his forehead, wrapped her arms around him—tried all the arts of sympathy which her woman's heart could devise—but in vain. Nothing that she could say or do seemed to have any effect upon him. Only when she strove gently to disengage the paper from his frenzied grasp he resisted her fiercely, and with his long, nervous fingers tore it into strips. Finally, she did what perhaps was wisest—she left him altogether to himself, and seated herself a little distance away.

It was well that she had patience. She sat there motionless, after the first passion of sobs had exhausted itself, for nearly an hour. Then he looked up at her, and she shuddered as she looked into his white, agony-stricken face.

"*Mon père*, something terrible has happened!" she faltered.

"Ay, something terrible has happened," he repeated, in a hollow, far-away tone.

He was silent for fully five minutes. Then he rose slowly to his feet. "I must go out."

"Go out?" she almost screamed. "Why, father, what can you be thinking of? Didn't the doctor say, only yesterday, that you were not to move from your bed for a week?"

"I must go out to-day—at once—though I die to-morrow," he said, wearily but firmly. "Get me my coat and hat, Marie, and send for a cab; my legs are weak; I can't walk."

She strove again to turn him from his purpose. He only shook his head impatiently.

"At least tell me what this terrible thing is which has happened," she begged, her woman's curiosity mingled with her dread. "If it is terrible for you, is it not terrible for me, too? Am I not your daughter?"

"You will know—perhaps," he answered. "Not now. I have no breath to spare. I shall need all—I have—presently. Is the cab—at the door?"

"I have sent for it—it will be here directly. Oh, *mon père*, let me go with you," she begged. "You are not fit to go out anywhere alone."

"Go with me—you!" He shuddered as though the idea hurt him. Then the sound of the cab stopping below reached his ears.

"Give me your arm downstairs," he said. "I am a little dizzy."

He needed it. At every fourth step he had to stop and rest, and his breathing at times almost choked him. When at last he reached the cab he sank into a corner and for a minute or two was too exhausted to give the driver any directions. Marie had gone with him bare-headed into the street, and stood holding his hand. But when he recovered himself he motioned her away into the house with an impatient gesture.

"You mustn't stand there, Marie, with no hat

on. I shall be all right. Run into the—house—please."

She left him with swimming eyes and uneasy heart. The cabman, who was getting impatient, put his head in at the window.

"Where to, sir?" he asked.

M. de Feurget consulted a fragment of the newspaper which he had retained in his hand.

"The Rising Sun, Brown Street, Bethnal Green Road. Drive fast!"

CHAPTER VII.

FACE TO FACE WITH THE DEAD.

Almost at the same time as the jury were sitting in Grosvenor Square upon the body of the Earl of Harrowdean an inquest of a very different character was being held in another part of London. The scene was the Rising Sun, Brown Street, Bethnal Green Road, and the subject of the inquest the body of an unknown woman found murdered in her room on the same night as the terrible West End murder.

The mysterious murder of a peer of the realm, a great diplomatist, and one of the most distinguished men of the day, is a far more sensational episode than the murder of an unknown woman in a slum. But local interest in the less notorious murder was very strong indeed. The victim was almost a stranger in the district, but upon those with whom she had spoken or come in contact she had made an impression. She was not one of them, and they knew it. She had shared none of their vices, nor had their habits been hers. There were many stories floating about, and some very mysterious whispers, but they were all agreed upon one point. She was not one of them.

The jurymen, one by one, picking their way through the filthy streets and elbowing a passage for themselves among the crowd of ruffianly-looking men and brazen-faced, unsexed-looking women who swarmed

about the door of the Rising Sun, heard something of these rumors and felt their curiosity quickened. They were watched with envious eyes as they passed through the swing-doors and were admitted into the public-house. Perhaps they felt something of the same sense of added self-importance in having been selected for this dreary task as their fellow-jurymen in the West End had felt when respectfully ushered to their places by a little body of bowing black-liveried servants. If so, they showed little of it in their faces, which, to do them justice, were stolid enough. One by one they passed in and made their way to the sanded parlor, stained with and odorous of beer and smoke. Most of them were minor tradesmen in the neighborhood, and when they were all assembled in a group they looked as hard, and unsympathetic, and wooden-headed a body of men as could easily have been got together.

The coroner arrived in a hansom, with a bland apology for unpunctuality, which was received by a sullen silence. He sank into the chair at the head of the table, made a great show of pausing to recover his breath, and proposed that the proceedings should be commenced by an inspection of the body, which, he added, had not yet been identified.

The proposition was acted upon at once. Preceded by the sergeant in charge of the case, the little body of men filed up a creaking wooden staircase into an upper room, light and clean, but barely furnished. There in the middle of the chamber was a plain wooden bedstead, and upon it, underneath the smoothly-drawn counterpane, was the outline of a human figure. With a touch that was almost gentle the coroner withdrew the covering and disclosed the face of the dead woman.

The course, rough body of men who thronged around felt something akin to awe pierce even their toughened sensibilities. They looked over one another's shoulders into the calm, peaceful face of a beautiful woman instead of, as most of them had expected, into a vice-stained hideous countenance.

The mass of golden hair which lay coiled about her

pillow was tinged with gray, and there were lines upon her forehead; but these were small drawbacks. There was something, too, about the small shapely head, with its firm mouth and well-cut features, which was essentially thoroughbred.

"It's a lady, or I never see'd one," whispered a juryman.

There was a murmur of assent. A new interest in the case had been awakened among them. Instead of taking a hasty glance at the corpse and hurrying away to finish the business up, they lingered round the bedside, as though loath to depart. One of them lifted up her arm with clumsy reverence and silently pointed out to the others the plain gold wedding-ring on her delicate white finger. When at last they turned away they talked to one another in whispers, and the coroner looked thoughtful.

"Have any attempts at identification been made?" he asked the sergeant who was in charge of the case.

"Several, sir, but all unsuccessful. Every one who came turned away at once after a single glance at her. Beg pardon, sir, one moment."

The coroner obeyed his beckoning finger and stepped on one side. The sergeant drew a small parcel from his pocket, and dropped his voice to a mysterious pitch.

"Mrs. Preece, sir—that's the woman who was called in to see to her—found this 'ere tightly locked on the top of her arm, above the elbow. It's a curious spring, you see, sir, and it took her a long time to take it off, it was so stiff. Seems a queer place, like, for a bracelet, don't it, sir?"

The coroner took it to the light and examined it. It was simply a plain gold bangle, without initials or any mark. The fastening, as the sergeant had remarked, was very stiff, as though it had not been often used. The coroner was not a romantic man—far from it—but he held the bracelet reverently, and indulged for a few moments in silent thought. It was a love token, that was very evident, and she had worn it though sorrow and distress and poverty, perhaps degra-

dation; she had worn it still heedless of the fact that it would have brought her gold, would have brought her food and drink and comfort, at any rate, for a time, had she chosen to part with it. Doubtless it was the one solitary link which bound her to the past.

"You did quite right, sergeant," he said, in a business-like tone. "There is no object in keeping the discovery secret, though. It may aid toward identification."

The sergeant saluted and followed the coroner into the sanded parlor where the jury were waiting. The proceedings were commenced at once, but at a very early stage there came an interruption. A four-wheeled cab stopped at the door outside, creating no little commotion among the little crowd of idlers who had gathered there, and out of it a short, pale man, very much muffled up, was seen to descend and enter the public-house. There was a moment's curious pause, and then came a knock at the door.

"Come in," responded the coroner.

A policeman entered and saluted.

"Beg pardon, sir," he exclaimed, apologetically; "but there's a gentleman outside as thinks he can identify the body."

"Very good. Take his name and address, policeman, and show him upstairs," directed the coroner. "Let me know the result."

The policeman closed the door and returned to the new-comer, whom he found sitting down on a bench outside. He repeated the coroner's directions to him.

The stranger hesitated for a moment. Then he drew a small morocco case from his pocket and took out a card.

The policeman held it between his thumb and forefinger and scrutinized it.

"M. de Feurget, 19 Craven Street. Very good, sir. Will you come this way?"

The policeman crossed the passage and descended the narrow creaking stairs. The other followed slowly, holding on to the banisters with one hand and with the other pressed to his side. At the top of the landing he paused and gasped for breath.

"Seems to me you ain't scarcely fit to be out," remarked the burly policeman, pityingly.

"I'm not—well," M. de Feurget answered. "Is that the room?"

The policeman nodded, with his hand upon the handle. M. de Feurget checked him.

"One moment. Do me—a favor, will you? Let me—go in—alone. You—wait for—me here."

The request was backed by a solid and glittering argument, which was irresistible. The policeman was but human, and sovereign tips are scarce. Besides, there was no harm in it—it wasn't even against orders. So he opened the door and stood aside while M. de Feurget passed in.

It was twilight in the room, and at first he could see nothing but the dim outline of a figure stretched out upon the iron bedstead. He moved a step toward it, groping his way and staggering like a drunken man. Then he stopped suddenly, covered his face with his hands, and half turned away as though he dared go no further. He moved a step nearer—gazed with fascinated eyes at a spot on the white sheet, and wondered how it came there. Again he moved another step, and his fingers rested upon the coverlet which concealed the face. Dare he raise it? How his fingers, his knees, his whole frame, quivered with an unutterable horror. God! that this should be she!

The hand with its wedding-ring had been left hanging down. He caught it passionately in his and bore it to his lips. He held it away from him, and looked at the blue veins and white fingers with streaming eyes. It was hers; he recognized it. Farewell hope! Farewell all dreams of an altered and a happier future! Welcome grim, black despair!

Dead! Murdered! With a tenderness which no woman's touch could have equalled, he lifted the coverlet from her face and gazed into the still features. It was she. Beautiful in life, beautiful in death, beautiful forever in his heart. Dead or alive the last embrace should be his, and throwing himself down on his knees by the

side of the rough bedstead he pressed his trembling lips to her cold forehead, and folded his arms in one last passionate caress around her still, lifeless form.

. . . . . .

Downstairs the coroner was growing impatient, and at last sent a messenger up to know how long the gentleman was going to be. M. de Feurget met him on the stairs and returned with him.

"I am glad to say that I am not able to positively identify the deceased," he announced. "She is not the person of whom I am in search. At—at—the same time I have seen her before."

"Do you know her name?" the coroner asked.

M. de Feurget shook his head.

"I'm afraid not. I met her abroad, I believe, but where I cannot say. I feel some interest in this sad affair, on that account, and if—if it would be permitted —I should be glad to arrange for the funeral."

The coroner thought that there would be no difficulty.

"Perhaps, sir, as you feel some interest in the matter, you would like to remain during the inquest," he added courteously. "Something may happen to refresh your memory, and any evidence as to the antecedents of the deceased would be very acceptable to us."

M. de Feurget bowed and took the chair which was offered to him.

"I should certainly like to watch the proceedings," he said, quietly.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANOTHER INQUEST AND ANOTHER VERDICT.

"CALL the first witness!" ordered the coroner sharply.

The policeman threw open the door, and fixed his eyes upon a little knot of men and women who were whispering together in a corner of the passage.

"Mike Beaston," he called, "you're wanted! Come this way."

A tall, broad-shouldered man in the garb of a navvy

detached himself from the group and came forward. The policeman solemnly beckoned him into the room, motioned him where to stand, and closed the door.

"Your name is Mike Beaston?" inquired the coroner

"I should like ter see the man as said it warn't," was the somewhat pugnacious reply. The witness had been preparing himself for the unaccustomed ordeal through which he had to pass by frequent visits to the tap-room, with the result that without being drunk he was inclined to be quarrelsome. But a glance at the coroner sent all the Dutch courage oozing out of his heels. The latter was used to such witnesses and knew how to treat them. He had assumed an air of the severest displeasure, and the frowning gaze which he bent upon the unfortunate Mr. Beaston was particularly disconcerting to that gentleman.

"Answer simply yes or no," he remarked, sharply. "Your name is Mike Beaston?"

"Yessur," was the much-subdued answer.

"What are you by trade?"

"Shure I work at anything. I ain't 'ticular. I've been on a job at Egson's Wharves the last month, sur."

"You lodge at 19 Bloomer's Place?" asked the coroner.

"For shure, yer honor," replied the witness.

"And your room was on the floor above the one occupied by the deceased?"

"Yes, sur."

"At what hour did you return home on Tuesday night, the 17th?"

"'Bout arf 'our arter closing time."

The coroner looked up, mystified.

"Do you mean——"

"Beg pardon, sir. He means after the public-houses are closed," interrupted P. C. 198, significantly.

The coroner accepted the explanation, but promptly snubbed P. C. 198 for interfering, to the delight of the witness. P. C. 198 assumed a gloomy air of outraged

dignity, and during the remainder of the examination did not open his lips.

"Did you go straight to bed when you got home?" the coroner went on.

"For shure I did; what else wur there for me to do in my bit o' a room? I just tumbled on my bed, and it's meself wur fast aslape in less than no time, yer honor."

"You heard no noise in the room below?"

"None, yer honor."

"Nor as you passed it on your way up?"

"No, sur."

"Not even voices?"

"Not even voices, sur. It was all as quiet as the grave."

"Until what time did you sleep?"

"It wur about half-past six when I woke up, and turned out straight away."

"Tell me what you saw on your way downstairs."

The witness, who was now quite at his ease, ran one hand lightly through his hair, and after a brief pause to collect his thoughts, commenced volubly, but disconnectedly, to explain the circumstances which led to his being connected with the case as witness. He was on his way downstairs, and was just passing the door of the room below his when he noticed a dark stain on the boards, which, when he put his foot on it, he perceived was wet. He struck a light, and, stooping down, found to his horror that it was blood which was slowly trickling in a little stream from underneath the door of the room which he was passing.

"Indeed, yer honor, I wur fair dazed, I wur, when I see'd it, and I didn't do nawthin' for a minute or two but look at it. Then I cum to meself, and I knocked at the door. 'Mrs. Ward,' sez I, 'Mrs. Ward, open the door, there's a good 'un;' but there warn't no answer, so I just put my foot against it, like, and open it went. I've seen some queer sights in my time," the witness continued, in an awed tone, "but that theer was a licker, and no gammon. It wur awful, for shure. She wur

a-lying flat on the floor with her head about a yard off the door, and one of her hands clutched in the bed things, and there were a long, thin knife—a queer shape like—buried in her chest. The blood had flowed from where she wur stabbed right underneath the door. It made me feel rare and bad just to look at it. I sez, 'Missus, who's a-done it?' but, Lord, it warn't no use speaking to her. She wur dead as a door-nail, stiff, and almost cold. Well, I just felt her, and I sings out for Mrs. Judkin, and, be jabers—I beg your pardon, your honor—but there wur a rare to-do then. I just sez, 'Mrs. Judkin, here's rare goings on,' and she peeped in the room, and she went straight off into one of them there fainting fits. Then a lot of others they came in, and I off and fetched a doctor and a copper—this 'un here, yer honor," the witness remarked, indicating Police Constable 198 by a supercilious gesture. "There warn't no other about, so I had to bring him," he added apologetically to the jury. "I knowed he'd make a blooming hash of it all the same."

The coroner bit his lip, and so did several of the jury. Police Constable 198 looked scornfully indifferent, or rather tried to. Mike Beaston grinned and bore a sharp reprimand from the coroner with exemplary meekness.

A few more questions were asked, but without result. Evidently the witness had told everything he knew of the affair, so he was dismissed.

"Mrs. Judkin is the next witness. Shall I call her, sir?" inquired Police Constable 198.

"Mrs. Judkin, the landlady? Certainly," said the coroner.

Mrs. Judkin was called, and a plain, hard-featured woman stepped into the room. She was dressed in a rusty black gown, which had evidently seen better days, and had a shawl of the same sombre hue twisted around her shoulders. Unlike the last witness, she was evidently perfectly at her ease; but there was an air of extreme caution, not to say wariness, in the slow replies which she gave to the questions that were asked

her which was decidedly not prepossessing. Before she had been before him five minutes the coroner had decided, rightly or wrongly, that she was keeping something back. The idea naturally quickened his interest in the case.

"How long had the deceased been a lodger of yours?" he asked.

"Nearly two weeks, sir."

"What was her occupation during that time?"

"She did no work, sir, as I know on."

"She paid you regularly, then?"

"Pretty well."

"Did it never strike you that she was a different sort of person to your other lodgers, for instance?"

"Can't say as it did, particular. I didn't take much notice of her."

"She gave you the name of Mrs. Ward when she came?"

"Yes."

"Had you any reason to suppose that this was not her real name?"

"No. I didn't bother my head about it. One name was as good as another to me."

"How did the deceased pass the time if she did no work?"

"I don't know. How should I? I've summut else to do besides watch my lodgers about."

"She went out occasionally, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; she went out sometimes."

"Did she ever go out at night?"

"I don't know as she did," the witness admitted. "She kept herself respectable, seemingly. She was mostways at home crying at nights."

"Did she ever have any visitors?"

"Never until the night she was murdered."

There was a slight sensation among the jurymen. M. de Feurget, too, leaned forward with nervously twitching lips and bloodshot eyes. He was evidently deeply interested.

"She had more than one visitor on that night, then?"

"She had two."

"Did they come together, or at different times?"

"At different times."

"Were they both men?"

"Yes."

"Now, tell me at what time the first one arrived."

"About half-past nine."

"Can you describe him?"

"No, I dunno as I can. He just knocked at the door o' my room; so I sez 'Come in,' but he didn't no more than just come half-way in like, and I wur a-sitting t'other end wi' a little oil lamp on the table by me, so he wur in the dark like. He just sez, 'Which is Mrs. Ward's rooms?' and I sez 'Second floor front!' and off he goes. He wur a little chap and thin—about the size of that there gent"—and she pointed to M. de Feurget, who frowned and seemed ill-pleased at the comparison.

"How long did he remain upstairs?"

"Not more than 'arf an hour, I shouldn't think."

"Did you hear their voices?"

"Yes, now and agen."

"Were they talking in a loud key? Did they seem to be disagreeing?"

"Summut of that sort. She wur a-sobbing and carrying on, and he wur terrible angry."

"You didn't overhear any part of the conversation?"

"No. I didn't listen."

"What happened after this first visitor had left?"

"Another gent came about ten minutes afterward."

"Did you see anything of him? Can you describe him?"

"No, that I can't. He wur tall and slim, and had a beautiful voice, but I couldn't see nothing of his face, he wur so muffled up. I know one thing about 'im, though. He wur a gent, the proper sort, too."

"Did he ask you for Mrs. Ward?"

"Yes. I called out 'Fust door on fust landing,' and he says 'Thank'ee,' and off he goes."

"Mrs. Ward's room was the one just above yours, then?"

"Yes."

"Did you hear them talking?"

"Never once; they were very quiet."

"You did not hear any quarrel or scream, or the sound of any falling body?"

"Nothing."

"That seems very strange. Of the two visitors, it certainly seems as though the last must have been the murderer. And yet you say that you did not even hear an ordinary quarrel?"

"No."

The witness had suddenly become taciturn. She stood nervously drawing her shawl closer around her shoulders, and, notwithstanding the closely-set lips, there was an air of irresolution about her which the coroner was quick to notice.

"Did you see this visitor when he came downstairs?"

"No."

"Did you hear him?"

"No."

"Then you don't know how long he was upstairs?"

"No."

"You are quite sure that these answers are absolutely correct? You are on your oath, remember."

"I am quite sure."

"Then you neither saw nor heard anything of deceased or of this visitor from the time of his arrival to the next morning, when you were summoned upstairs by Mike Beaston?"

"No, I didn't."

"And you will swear that Mrs. Ward had no other visitor that night?"

The witness was evidently disturbed. She hesitated and changed color.

"I don't know nothing about that," she answered slowly.

"Have you any reason to suppose that the deceased had any other visitor upon that night?"

"She might 'a 'ad. It's like this, you see," the witness continued, reluctantly; "the room next to Mrs.

Ward's I lets by the night when I gets the chance, and I'd let it for that night to a woman called Betsy Urane. I 'eard her cum in 'bout two hours arter the second gent had gone up to Mrs. Ward's."

The witness paused, and there was a little stir of interest. M. de Feurget was leaning forward in his seat, with his hand pressed to his side, and with an intense feverish excitement gleaming in his dark eyes. The witness remained sullenly silent, her long, bony fingers restlessly interlacing themselves with the fringe of her shawl. Her manner increased the supposition that she had something still to reveal.

"Did the woman Betsy Urane come in alone?"

"I dunno. I suppose not."

"You could hear any one going upstairs from your room?"

"Yes."

"And you heard foosteps after the woman Urane had entered?"

"Yes."

"The footsteps of one person or of more than one?"

"There was a man and a woman."

"You will swear that you did not see the man?"

"I will."

"Did they enter the room which the woman Urane had engaged?"

"Yes."

"And did you hear either of them leave it?"

"Yes."

"Which?"

"The woman."

"When?"

"About five minutes after their arrival. I was going to bed, and I met her on the stairs, coming down."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

"Where was her companion?"

"She said that she had left him in the room while she went out to buy something."

"Did she return?"

"No."

"Have you seen her since?"

"No."

The proceedings were stayed while the coroner gave some whispered instructions to the constable, who immediately left the room.

"Was her companion found in the room this morning?"

"No."

"Did you hear him leave?"

"No."

"Thank you; that will do, Mrs. Judkin."

Mrs. Judkin gave her shawl a final twitch and left the room with an unmistakable air of relief in her hard, expressionless face. The coroner finished making some notes, and then, laying down his pen, turned to the jury.

"I have sent for the woman Betsy Urane," he said. "I think you will all agree with me that she is likely to prove an important witness."

There was a murmur of assent which had scarcely subsided when P. C. 198 entered the room and made his way over to the coroner's chair.

"I have discovered the woman, sir," he announced, in a self-satisfied tone. "She is outside."

The coroner nodded approvingly.

"Very good," he said. "Send her in at once."

"Betsy Urane" was called and Betsy Urane appeared. She was a tall, stout woman, with a pile of yellow hair untidily arranged, coarse, unpleasant features, and a bold, defiant expression. She was dressed in some cast-off finery, evidently purchased at a second-hand shop, and altogether her appearance could only be described as repulsive. The coroner drew a fresh supply of paper toward him and commenced his examination at once.

"Your name is Betsy Urane?"

"Yes, it is."

"You were at 19 Bloomer's Place, on last Tuesday night, with a man?"

"Well, and if I was?"

"Will you tell us who your companion was?"

"I would if I knowed, but I don't."

"How long had you known him before taking him there?"

"About an hour."

"Where did you meet him?"

"In the Crown and Thistle bar."

"You had never seen him before, then?"

"Never."

"Did he speak to you first, or you to him?"

The witness hesitated. The coroner was used to all types of witnesses, and made up his mind quickly how to treat this one.

"Betsy Urane," he said, sharply, "I don't know whether you have ever been a witness at an inquest before. In case you haven't, I feel it my duty to urge upon you the necessity and wisdom of speaking the truth, and of telling everything you know concerning the matter you are asked about. You are on your oath, you must remember, and you are liable to be prosecuted for perjury if you make a single false statement or attempt to evade the truth in any way. We are here to sift this matter to the bottom, and we know a good deal already," he added, significantly.

The witness was cowed, but put a bold front on it.

"There's no need for all that palavering," she said, sullenly. "I should have told you all I knowed wi'out. It was like this 'ere. I was a-sitting in the Crown and Thistle, having a glass along wi' a lady friend o' mine, when a stranger chap came in, and I heard 'im ask at the bar whether they knowed where a Mrs. Judkin lived. Well, Mrs. Judkin and me being particular friends, I jumps up, and goes to 'im. 'I know where Mrs. Judkin lives,' I sez. 'I has a room there myself often.' So he turns round and looks at me and then draws me on one side.

"'Do you know a Mrs. Ward who lives in 'er 'ouse?' he asks. 'Can't say as I've ever spoken to 'er,' I sez, 'but I knows her by sight. 'Er room's next the one I

generally 'as there.' Then he asks me some more questions about her, whether she wur very poor, whether she went out and such like, and I told him as much as I knew, and, natural like, asked him to stand summut. He paid for drinks, and then he went a little way off, and stood by 'imself as though he wur thinking something over. Just before closing time he cum back to me. 'Did you say that your room at Mrs. Judkin's was next to Mrs. Ward's?' he asked. I told 'im as it was, and he sez, quiet like, 'Could you take me into your room for a short time?' 'In coors,' I says, and off we went. Well, when we got there he made me show him her door, and when he got into my room he did nothing but walk up and down and mutter to himself, excited like. Then he comes up to me and sez, 'I want to be alone here for a short time. If I gives you a sovereign will you leave me this room for to-night, and find a lodging somewhere else?' 'In coors I will,' I sez, and I just lays 'old of the quid and hoff I goes. I ain't seen 'im since, and I don't know no more about 'im."

"Can you describe him?"

"Well, I can; but I dunno as it 'ud be much good, for he had a false beard and false whiskers, and false 'air on; and I'm pretty sure he wasn't used to such clothes as 'e was wearing, which was rough 'uns. He wur rather stout, wi' a yellow beard and yellow 'air, rather a long thin face, wi' bright eyes, and 'e 'eld 'is 'ead as though he wur a gent, and 'e walked like one. He wur dressed rough enough, but 'is 'ands wur white and soft. I can't tell yer much more."

"If you could describe his clothes a little, it might help us," said the coroner suggestively.

"Well, he wore a long, dark blue overcoat, patched in a lot o' places, and wi' a hole or two in; a billycock 'at, broke at the top, and a dirty white 'andkerchief tied round 'is throat."

"You are quite sure that you have not seen him in the neighborhood before?"

"I'll take my oath I ain't."

"Very good. That will do, Mrs. Urane."

The witness, who had quite recovered her composure, nodded jauntily and swaggered out of the room. Several other witnesses, including the doctor, were examined without anything fresh coming to light. Then the weapon with which the murder had been committed was produced and handed round.

The interest in the case, which had flagged a little, was revived at once by its appearance. It was of strange, graceful shape, of the finest Damascus steel, and with an elaborately carved handle. One by one the jurymen handled it, and each passed it on with a little murmur of admiration.

"This weapon should certainly furnish a clue," the coroner remarked, handing it back to the emissary of the police. "It must have been stolen from somewhere."

The man nodded, and thought that there was no doubt about that. Then there was a few minutes' consultation, and the verdict was recorded:

"Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown."

A couple of hours later printed bills with all the description which had been obtained of the murderer hung on the doors of every police-station in London, with the ominous heading: "Wanted!" and by nightfall detectives with a copy of the bill in their pocket-books were watching every train which arrived at the great ports of the country, and every outward-bound vessel of every sort was placed under a rigid espionage. The whole machinery of Scotland Yard was set in motion to discover the man in the long blue overcoat.

CHAPTER IX.

A DESPERATE WOMAN.

It was midnight, and Lady Harrowdean sat alone in her room, leaning back in a low wicker chair and watching the fitful flames and dull embers of a slowly dying fire. She had dismissed her maid an hour ago, and

since then she had been sitting there motionless and silent. At first the dancing firelight had played upon her pale, haggard cheeks and around her black-robed form and had sparkled in her dry, lustreless eyes; but now the flames had burned themselves out, and she sat in the shadow, almost in darkness. It had been a terrible hour for her—it was so still. A task from which she shrank with a nameless horror lay before her—inevitable, yet hideous. For long she had sat there battling with herself, striving to crush her scruples, her fears, her overmastering dread—and she had not succeeded.

The great house was silent as the grave. From outside there came occasionally the noise of some passing vehicle, and at regular intervals the stillness of the night was broken by the deep, mellow booming of Westminster clock. But inside there was a tranquil silence. The servants had retired early; Lord Bernard earlier still. Lady Harrowdean alone kept watch of the night.

Midnight had come and passed. The quarters had struck three times, and the first hour of morning was nearly over. Then Lady Harrowdean stirred slightly, and woke from her apathy.

A lamp and a newspaper were on a small round table by her side. She turned the former up, adjusted the shade, and commenced to read. The paper was the *Telegraph*, the date the day after the inquest at the Rising Sun, and the paragraph which she was reading was—the account of that inquest.

She knew it almost by heart, but she read it over again slowly, and stopped at one place. Always that one place! She had read it over before, and had stopped there each time. There seemed to be a sort of fascination for her in that brief disclosure by the coroner. But it was the fascination of terror!

She put the newspaper down and rose slowly to her feet. One o'clock struck while she stood there hesitating, and the sound of the hour seemed to give her courage. She crossed the room and opened an

elaborately-carved massive wardrobe. After a few moments' inspection she took out a long loose dressing-gown of some dark material, and, hastily divesting herself of her gown, wrapped it around her. Then she exchanged her high-heeled shoes for soft bedroom slippers, which sank noiselessly into the heavy carpet, and, recrossing the room, took up the lamp. Something of desperation seemed to have stolen into her white, haggard face, as she made these preparations, but it was desperation mixed with a great, shrinking fear. There was something to be done which seemed to her more awful than any other task which could have been set before her—something which she would have given years of her life to have been able to have left undone. But there was no escape, no second course. It must be done before morning broke.

She knew it, and the knowledge gave her strength. With swift, even footsteps she crossed the floor, holding the lamp over her head, and, softly turning the handle of the door, left the room.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE CHAMBER OF DEATH!

A CARELESS servant had turned the venetian blinds the wrong way, and a struggling moonbeam had forced its way into the stately bedchamber. Across the dark crimson carpet it cast long, trembling bars of light, and shone on the stiff, cold sheets of the canopied bed and on the ghastly face of the man who lay there. But it was a great room, and the poor little moonbeam could do no more than feebly illuminate one very small corner of it. The rest was wrapped in a veil of thick darkness.

Silent as the dead! Silent as death! Common phrases enough, but peculiarly expressive. There was death in this room, death and a deep breathless silence. For it was the face of a corpse round which that moonbeam was playing. Skilful hands had bandaged his throat

and had laid out his stiff, lifeless limbs, and Lord Alceston, Earl of Harrowdean, lay in state, waiting for the morrow, when his body would go to its last resting-place.

Hark! A sound at last, breaking in upon the solemn stillness! A strange sound, too—the low rustling of a woman's skirts along the broad corridor. At last it ceased just outside the door; then was the stealthy turning of a handle, and a tall black form softly entered. The door was closed again. Again there was silence.

She moved toward the bedside, but slowly. Long before her dark form had emerged from the shadows the sound of her quick, anxious breathing betrayed her whereabouts. At last she glided out of the darkness and stood between the window and the bedside, in the focus of the moonlight. The quivering beams played upon a face set and rigid as marble, ghastly and colorless, yet desperate. It was the face of the Countess of Harrowdean.

She was close to the bedside now, close to the mass of odorous, sweet-scented flowers, whose delicate perfume hung heavily about the confined atmosphere—close to that white, rigid form, colorless as the damask sheets—most awesome, most fear-inspiring of all human sights—the corpse from which the last breath has parted, the last spark of life died out. Once those lips, now cold as clay, had burned against hers. Once those eyes, now closed and dim, had looked fondly into hers, now filled with a soft, gentle love-light, now full of passion and fire, and she had loved him! God! how she had loved him!

Three times stooping down, until her breath fell hot upon his face, she stretched out her hand, and three times she withdrew it again. She turned away with a little moan of despair, like the last cry of a hunted animal. It seemed to her that her task was an impossible one. She could not touch him. It was sacrilege, desecration. It stirred into revolt all her emotions; she shrank from it as from some deed of shame, and yet—

yet it must be done, and now. To-morrow the opportunity would have gone forever. To-morrow would be too late.

Her hand descended again, and rested upon his arm. Ah! it was there. The hand which she had been holding dropped heavily from her nerveless fingers and fell upon the sheets with a little thud. She staggered back against the wall and leaned there, crouching back against it with her hands clasping her throbbing head and her eyes riveted upon the sheets. Her white lips moved slowly in a half-uttered prayer. Oh for strength, a little strength, just to keep her from going mad!

When she moved again her limbs were stiff and her movements mechanical. Without hesitation she took up again his arm and turned the shirt-sleeve up above the elbow. The long white arm with its blue veins lay exposed to the moonlight, and high up something was glistening and shining in the flood of silvery light. Her fingers closed around it, hiding it from view. For a moment her whole frame shook with excitement, and then a little sob of relief burst from the trembling lips. She withdrew her hand and slipped something into the pocket of her dressing-gown. The long white arm lay there still upon its bed of flowers and perfumed linen. But something had gone—something which had been there when that arm had flourished a dripping sword and waved an eager regiment on to victory—something which had been there when that arm had trembled with the fierce gesticulations of the orator who was compelling the wild tumultuous applause of an excited senate house—something which had been there when the arm which it had encircled had been pressed by royal fingers. Dangers and sickness, triumphs and glory, it had seen, and when the last breath had quitted the body, and his life had gone out like a suddenly-quenched lamp, it had remained. But severance had come at last.

Another sound breaking the hushed silence of the sleeping house! Slight though it was, she heard it, and the blood in her veins ran cold as ice from head to foot.

She trembled, and her shaking knees almost gave way beneath her. A footstep in the corridor! A light, firm footstep, drawing nearer and nearer. It stopped, and her heart gave a great throb. She clutched at the wall for support, shrinking back against it with reeling senses and with dilated eyes fixed upon the door. The handle was softly turned, a tall figure entered. She with the quivering moonlight shining upon her ghostly face convulsed with terror, he barely visible, stepping out from the deep shadows. Mother and son stood face to face.

CHAPTER XI.

GHOSTS.

At first it seemed to her as though she must yield to the deadly faintness which was already clouding her senses. Surely this must be some hideous dream—the flower-strewn bed, cold and ghastly in the moonlight, the uncovered arm, and her son's pale questioning face, stern and sad, looming out of the black shadows. Was it a dream, and he a ghost? Alas! no, for his lips were slowly parted, and the death-like stillness was broken by his quick, agitated words:

"Mother! You here! and—— What has happened? What have you been doing?"

"I could not rest. I came—to look at him—once more," she faltered.

He pointed to the disarranged white garments, to the bare arm of the figure on the bed. He asked no questions; he simply pointed, and looked at her. What did it mean?

Nothing which she had imagined to herself had been so awful as this. That she should stand face to face with him, of all people in the world, and have to answer that look of almost fierce inquiry. What should she do? What should she do?

"I will tell you—presently," she gasped. "Ask me nothing now. I am faint. This has upset me."

With trembling fingers she re-covered his arm and smoothed down the draperies on the bed. Then she turned half-fearfully round. He was standing quite still, waiting for her, with a white set look on his face that made her heart sink. He was her son, but he would be a hard inquisitor. What was she to tell him? Anything—anything but the truth!

"I cannot stop—here," she said. "Take me back to my room."

He stretched out his arm, and she leaned heavily upon it. Slowly they moved across the darkened room and gained the door. Outside, in the dimly-lit corridor, she seemed to breathe more freely.

"It was foolish of me to come," she said in a whisper.

He looked down at her.

"You had a purpose?" Ay, a purpose! Had she not a purpose? And he was seeking to know it; he would try to wrest it from her. He—calm, strong, and self-reliant, against her—weak, shaken, and fearful. How was she to resist him—how to evade his questions? The thought of it made her shudder.

They had reached the door of her room, and she had paused, hoping that he might go. But he only waited until she had passed in and then he followed her, closing the door after him. She sank wearily into her low chair and buried her face in her hands. He drew himself up before her and spoke.

"Mother," he said, "am I asking you a hard, an unreasonable thing, when I ask you to tell me what motive you had in going—there to-night, and what you had been doing? I think not. Why should there be secrets between us? Am I not your son, and was he not my father as well as your husband? I will never rest—never—until I have discovered the secret of his death. I have sworn it! Don't you feel like that, too? You must! Let us help one another in this! Our object is the same!"

He ceased, and waited for an answer. None came. She kept her face hidden from him, buried in her hands; and he thought at first that she was weeping.

But when she looked up he saw that the dry, burning eyes were tearless.

"Mother," he went on, speaking more rapidly, "it has been a new idea to me altogether that there should have been any mystery or secret cloud in connection with—him. Yet something of the sort there must have been, and—forgive me—but it seems to me that you must have known—must know—a little of it. What does it all mean? Neillson's flight, your strange manner, and your visit to his room alone, and at this hour? If you know anything at all—and you must know a good deal—why not tell me and help me to gain a clue? Surely you cannot wish his murderer to escape? God forbid!"

"It may be better so," she murmured. "Can you doubt but that God will punish?"

"That is what you said before, mother," he answered, "and I tell you again that God's punishment would be too slow for me. I cannot rest while this thing remains undiscovered."

She shook her head.

"Has it never occurred to you that this secret may be one which it were best the world did not know?" she said, softly.

"In telling me you are not telling the world," he answered. "Whatever it was, I am his son and I have a right to know it. I am his avenger, and I will know it."

She looked at him calmly. Sooner or later this must be faced. Better now, perhaps, than at any other time.

"Never from me," she said, in a low firm tone.

He looked at her astonished.

"Do you mean this, mother?" he exclaimed.

"I do."

"You mean that you will tell me nothing? You mean that though what you know might bring his murderer to justice, you will still keep it to yourself?"

"I do, Bernard. If at this moment I could see before me your father's murderer I would let him go in peace. I would not touch him. If he were alive, I am sure that he would rather that it should be so."

His lips quivered with disappointment, and a little, too, with anger. His mother's words only irritated him. Weak, feminine folly! What else was it? A milk-and-water doctrine of forgiveness that found no favor in this man's heart. His purpose was not shaken a jot.

"Will you tell me what you were doing in his room to-night?" he asked. "At least I ought to know this, as I found you there."

"No. I cannot."

He turned his back upon her and walked to the door. She followed him with her eyes softened now and full of sad, wistful light. He was her son, her only son, and she loved him. Surely he would not leave her thus!

"Bernard," she cried, "you are not going away without even wishing me good-night!"

He paused with his hand on the door-knob.

"I wish you good-night, mother," he said, coldly, without turning round; and he left her.

The tears which had so long been denied to her came at last. She threw herself upon the bed in a passionate fit of weeping, and her whole frame was shaken by tumultuous sobs. When daylight streamed into the room and fell upon her haggard, grief-stained face, she was then still, exhausted, sleeping a troubled sleep.

The early morning sounds in the street below awakened her, and she rose and commenced moving restlessly about the room. Every now and then she stopped and pressed her hands to her burning forehead. Had ever woman to bear up against such misery as hers? she wondered. Surely not! Surely not! To the agony of her great loss was added now an overwhelming hideous dread. Slowly, but with a ghastly distinctness, the last night's scene in the death-chamber passed before her reeling brain! He had discovered her! He had asked her that question—that one question which she would never dare to answer. He had left her in anger, in anger none the less terrible because it was so cold, so self-contained. He suspected her, perhaps—of what, she dared not think. Was it not for his sake as well as hers that she was fighting this battle? And she could

not show him why! She could not show him why it were better—a thousand times better—to let his father's murder go unavenged—to let the whole terrible tragedy sink into the still waters of oblivion! She had lost her husband, and now she was to lose her son! What had she done, or left undone—wherein had she sinned, that Fate should deal with her so cruelly?

The morning stole on and the distant sounds of the awakening household reached her ears. For the first time she realized that night had come and gone and as yet her bed had been unslept in. Soon her maid would be coming with her tea and would notice it—would talk and gossip about it below—the one thing which it was most necessary to avoid. Wearily she stood up, disrobed herself, and crept within the sheets. She had no hope of sleep, nor did it come to her. How was it possible with so sore a heart and burning a brain as hers?

When Marie, her ladyship's French maid, softly entered the room about half an hour later and brought the dainty tea equipage to the side of the bed, she was shocked beyond measure to see the feverish light in her mistress' wide-open eyes and the terrible ravages which a single night had made in her face. With her little hands stretched out, and her shoulders almost on a level with her ears, she was not slow to express her consternation.

"Ah! but your ladyship is ill," she exclaimed, volubly. "*Tres malade.* Miladi has had no sleep! Ah! *quel dommage, quel dommage!*" she added, in a tone of deep commiseration.

Lady Harrowdean took her tea and made no reply.

"Not that any of us have had much sleep," Marie continued in a hushed whisper, with a half fearful, altogether mysterious glance around. "*Moi même*—as for myself, my eyes have been not once closed. It was not possible. Did your ladyship hear anything—anything strange in the night?"

Lady Alceston set her cup down and shook her head. Her hand was trembling so much that she could hold it no longer.

"No, I heard—no sound. Nothing."

"There were some strange, oh, such strange noises," Marie continued in an awed tone, and with appropriate gestures. "Several of us heard them. Myself, I was so frightened that I did draw the bedclothes close around my ears and did very nearly shriek. Ah, but it was horrible!" and she wound up with an effective little shiver, as though the memory of her fright were still oppressing her. Her ladyship turned her face upon her pillow and closed her eyes.

"Draw the curtains around the bed, Marie," she directed. "I shall try to sleep for an hour or two."

"It would be well for miladi," Marie murmured, as she obeyed. The bed was a French one, and Lady Alceston was now invisible—out of sight of the tell-tale rays of sunlight and the black, questioning eyes of her maid.

"One moment, Marie," she said, as her maid was gliding softly from the room. "What sort of noises were those that you heard, and in what part of the house? I hope that no thieves have been about."

Marie paused and advanced again toward the bedside, glad to have an opportunity of resuming the subject.

"Footsteps and muffled voices, your ladyship," she said impressively, "and in the long corridor too, near—near—the room where his lordship is. Thomas has searched in every place, *ce matin*, but there are no signs of any one having entered the house, and nothing is missing. We all thought that your ladyship must have heard them too, and we dreaded every moment that we should hear your ladyship's bell."

There was no sound from the bed for a few moments. Then her ladyship answered in a slow, deliberate tone:

"Foolish girls! you imagined it all. I was awake all night, and I heard no noises of any sort. There could have been nothing to cause them."

Marie was perfectly unconvinced, but dared express her dissent in no other way than by a shrug of her shapely shoulders and a most suggestive silence. Her

ladyship, who was watching her through a chink in the curtains, frowned.

"If I hear anything more of this, Marie," she said quietly, "you or any one else who mentions it will leave my service at once. Do you understand?"

Marie arched her black eyebrows. She was surprised, but she was too well trained a servant to show it. Miladi's wishes should be obeyed, she murmured. The subject should not be mentioned again by her, or by any one else if she could help it. At what hour would miladi please to rise?

Miladi made no reply. Her thoughts were otherwise engaged. A certain act of imprudence had just occurred to her.

"Marie," she said abruptly, "there is a newspaper in my rocking-chair. I want it."

Marie searched and shook her head. There was no newspaper there.

"Well, then, in the pocket of my dressing-gown," the mistress ordered sharply.

Marie took up the garment, shook out the folds, and felt in the pockets. They were empty.

"Then it must be on the floor by the side of the chair," her ladyship said anxiously.

Marie went down on her hands and knees, and looked about in all directions. Again her search was unsuccessful. There was no paper anywhere about. She rose with flushed face, and with her coquettish little white apron all crumpled, and made her report.

"Bring me my dressing-gown at once," ordered her mistress, in a strange, sharp tone.

Marie obeyed, wondering, but in silence. She saw with surprise that her mistress' hands were trembling, and that she seemed deeply agitated. They searched about together for a few minutes, but in vain. The paper was gone.

Lady Harrowdean was the first to abandon the search. Marie followed her example at once with a little sigh of relief. She stood before the glass for a moment to straighten her cap and hair. Behind her own face there

she saw that of her mistress, and its ghastly expression frightened her.

"Miladi is ill," she exclaimed, turning quickly round.

"I am a little faint, Marie," was the answer. "Help me into bed."

Marie did so, keeping up at the same time a running fire of half-admonitory, half-consolatory chatter. Miladi had overtaxed her strength. She must have quiet and rest or she would not be able to attend the funeral. It was foolish to have got out of bed and upset herself about a newspaper. Thomas should go out and get another one. Would miladi say what newspaper it was and what date she required?

Lady Alceston made no reply. She seemed not to have heard—certainly she did not heed her maid's sympathizing remarks. When she had finished she said simply:

"Tell Thomas to go to Lord Bernard's room, and ask him to come to my dressing-room for a minute. I wish to speak to him."

Marie withdrew with her head in the air, a little offended. Miladi was making a great fuss about a paltry newspaper; and fancy sending for Lord Bernard at this hour in the morning! It was too ridiculous.

She descended into the servants' hall, and delivered her message to Thomas. Instead of obeying her orders he shook his head.

"'Tain't no use, my dear," he said patronizingly. "Lord Bernard is hout."

Marie stamped her little foot impetuously.

"Nonsense! Gone out, at this time of the morning! You are too lazy to go and see, you—you—*gros bête!*"

Thomas grinned and sat down to his breakfast.

"Go it, mademoiselle," he said. "Call me all the names in your heathen calendar, if you like. It don't hurt me. I rather like it."

Marie tossed her head, and looked at him with flashing eyes.

"Are you going to obey miladi, and deliver her message to Lord Bernard?" she asked threateningly.

"No, my dear, I am not," Thomas answered, crossing his legs and sipping his coffee slowly.

"And why not?"

"Because I don't know where to find him."

"He is in his room. He never rises before nine."

"Well, he has done so this morning, at any rate," Thomas remarked. "As I said before, he has gone out. I ought to know, for I let him out myself."

"Out at this time in the morning! Why didn't you tell me so before, then, stupid?"

She stamped her foot at him and whisked out of the room. Thomas leaned back in his chair and looked after her admiringly.

"What a little spitfire she is," he soliloquized. "Wonder what her ladyship wants Lord Bernard for so early. Seems queer! And his going out, too, and them noises in the night. Dashed if it don't seem very queer!"

And he would have thought it queerer still if he could have heard the low, muffled cry which broke from Lady Alceston's white lips, after Marie had delivered her message and departed.

"He has seen it!" she moaned. "He has gone there. Oh! if he should—if he should——"

CHAPTER XII.

AN EAST-END FUNERAL.

Two men, both young, but very dissimllar in appearance, were making their way through the purlieus of one of London's worst slums. It was a fine, bright morning, and away westward toward Piccadilly and in Hyde Park the cheerful influence of the warm, glowing sunlight was very apparent in the smiling faces and light dresses of the gay throngs who passed up and down the broad streets. But here things were very different; here the dancing sunlight could do little toward chasing away the gloom and squalor of the narrow streets and filthy courts. Nay, into some of them it could scarcely penetrate at all, and where it did it shone with

a ghastly light on things that were better left in darkness—on the vice-stained, brutal faces of degraded, lounging men; on women from whose hard, brazen faces all the grace and charm of womanhood seemed stamped out; on children with the pinched, withered countenances of old men. Yet something of its influence had penetrated even here. The men dragged themselves to the doors of their miserable houses, and smoked their pipes in stolid silence on the threshold; the children strayed from the fetid courts into the open streets to play, and the toilers in the attics opened wide their windows, and looking up to the blue sky forgot for a moment their weary struggle for existence, and dreamed of other days.

. . . . . .

To one of the two young men his surroundings were strange; to the other they were very familiar. The one, therefore, walked steadily on with a shocked expression in his handsome face, and with the evident air of trying not to look about him. The other, on the contrary, appeared perfectly at his ease, and looked about him, frequently throwing keen, observant glances out of his bright eyes into the faces of the little knots of men who lounged about outside the public-houses and at the street corners. The former, Lord Bernard Alceston, in his deep mourning, a noticeable figure anywhere, looked as completely out of his element, and as incongruous with his surroundings, as a man well could; the latter, Stephen Thornton, journalist, Bohemian, and, as he was fond of styling himself, adventurer, might have passed through the whole of Whitechapel without attracting a single glance.

"Is the place we are going to in a part as bad as this?" Lord Alceston asked, with a little shudder.

"No, I don't think it is, quite," his companion answered. "Brown Street is quite on the outskirts of this region. But there are parts of London worse than this, you know—much worse."

"I shouldn't have believed it possible."

Thornton smiled a little bitterly.

"No, I dare say not," he answered. "You are born and bred in selfishness, you aristocrats. You never take the trouble to look outside the little world in which you live. Why should you? Jove! if there's a hell, how it will be peopled with those of your class!"

Lord Alceston shrugged his shoulders. He had known Thornton for many years, and was used to such talk from him.

"Radical as ever, Steve," he remarked.

"Ay, my lord, as Radical as ever. Radical, Communist, Socialist, Nihilist—what you will."

"Not so bad as that, Steve, I think," Lord Alceston answered, letting his arm rest for a moment on the other's shoulder. "You would make yourself out an ogre, whereas I know you to be one of the tenderest-hearted men alive."

"Not so bad! Alceston, I tell you this," Thornton answered almost roughly. "I'd rather, a thousand times rather, be known and branded as the very worst of these than be what you are."

"We'll change the subject, I think," Lord Alceston suggested.

"Agreed. You think this bad, do you?" Thornton continued, glancing around. "I don't know what you would say if you came here at night, then. The place is asleep now. Toward midnight it will wake up, and then, if you like, it's a sight to make a man feel sick. But, I forgot. What do you care about such things?—and here we are in Brown Street. The Rising Sun is about a couple of hundred yards up on the other side of the road."

They paused at the corner, and Lord Alceston looked around him. The street into which they had turned was much wider and the houses less squalid than in the neighborhood which they had just quitted. But it was still a miserable locality. The long rows of small, semi-detached houses were smoke-begrimed and blackened with dirt, and their dreary appearance was heightened by the wretchedly-bare handful of earth or gravel in front of each—courtesy could not call it a garden—and

the broken railings. The street itself was strewn with the refuse from the green-grocers' shops, which seemed to be at every corner not occupied by a public-house. There was a dreary, poverty-stricken appearance about the whole place—the very quintessence of suburban nastiness. To Lord Alceston, who was no dweller in cities, and who had spent most of his time either in the country or in the most picturesque of continental towns, its ugliness was a painful revelation. He always looked back upon that walk with feelings almost of horror.

A little way down the street, as though to put the finishing touch to the dreariness of the scene, a humble funeral *cortége* stood waiting. Thornton saw it, and stopped suddenly.

"We're too late," he said quietly, knitting his brows. "That is the Rising Sun where that hearse is standing. Evidently they are burying her to-day."

Lord Alceston looked across the road with a heavy frown. He was young and unused to failure, and he had made up his mind that he would look into that dead woman's face. His companion, whose private opinion was that they were on a wild-goose chase, shrugged his shoulders.

"We must bear it philosophically," he said. "By the by, how comes it, I wonder, that the parish is not burying her? She left neither friends nor money, it was said, yet some one has evidently undertaken the funeral."

"Suppose we go and inquire?" Lord Alceston suggested, moving forward.

Thornton laid his hand on his arm and checked him.

"No, stay here a minute. They must pass this way, and we can see who is inside. We can make inquiries afterward."

They stood on the edge of the pavement for nearly five minutes. Then the coffin was carried out, and the modest little cavalcade started.

"Go down that street a little way," Thornton said quickly. "You mustn't be seen here at all. It doesn't matter about me, and I shall be able to see who's inside."

Lord Alceston, too, was curious, and he hesitated. But, after all, doubtless it was sound advice. He had better go.

He had scarcely gone a dozen yards down the by-street into which he had turned when he heard the little procession passing along the top. He had not meant to turn round—in fact, he had made up his mind that he would not—it was a case of impulse triumphing over reason. He turned suddenly back and looked.

He had chosen exactly the right moment. Thornton was standing a little way in the road, as though he had been in the act of crossing and was waiting for the carriages to go by. But it was not on him that Lord Alceston's eyes rested. Something else there was that had changed his half-curious, half-careless glance into a rapt, breathless gaze, and which had set his heart beating fast and his pulses throbbing. From where he stood he could just distinguish the faces of the two people seated side by side in the solitary mourning coach. One—the one nearest to him—was the dark, handsome face of the girl whom he had found in the room with him in Craven Street after his swoon; the other was her father, the man with whom he had travelled up from Dover on the same day.

CHAPTER XIII.

HER LAST VISITOR.

For several moments after the carriage had passed out of sight Lord Alceston stood still on the pavement lost in astonishment. Then he slowly retraced his steps and met Thornton coming toward him.

"There's something I don't quite understand about this," said the latter, musingly. "The woman is unidentified, friendless, penniless, and without relations. Yet she's being buried at some one's expense, and some one who has a bit of money, too, for although there was only one mourning carriage everything was turned out in uncommonly nice style—not at all like an East-

End funeral—and that some one, with a very well-dressed young lady, goes to the funeral too. That seems queer."

"We had better go to the place where they brought her from—the public-house—and make inquiries," Lord Alceston suggested. He had recovered from his surprise by this time, and had not yet made up his mind whether he should tell Thornton that he had recognized the occupants of the mourning coach.

"That's exactly what I propose to do," Thornton remarked. "But you mustn't think of coming," he added, as Lord Alceston turned round as though to accompany him.

"And why not?"

"Why not, indeed! Can't you see? Supposing you were recognized, which is not at all unlikely, what would people think about the Earl of Harrowdean being down in these parts making left-handed inquiries about this unknown murdered woman? And, besides, you are not fit for this sort of work, Alceston, if you will excuse my saying so. I should never get any information out of any one with you at my side listening."

Lord Alceston was a young man who was fond of action, and he by no means liked abandoning the enterprise in this way.

"I'd much rather go with you, Thornton," he protested. "I don't see that I should make much difference."

"I do, and I know more about such matters than you. If I'm to do any good in this matter, Alceston, I must have my own way in this. The best thing you can do is to go home, and I'll come round and see you to-night, and tell you all about it—if there's anything to tell."

Lord Alceston shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

"Very well; I suppose I must give in," he said. "It's ridiculous to suppose that any one down here would know me; but——"

"Oh, no, it isn't anything of the sort," Thornton interrupted quickly. "You forget that Scotland Yard

has some little interest in this matter. I'm not much of a sporting man, but I wouldn't mind betting you long odds that there will be at least one detective hanging round the Rising Sun. Any one who goes there making even the most casual inquiries about the murdered woman will be a marked man at once. That doesn't matter as far as I'm concerned, because I happen to be a reporter; but if you were there——"

"All right, Thornton. I'm afraid you're right. I'll go. But don't forget to look me up to-night!"

Thornton nodded, and watched him until he was out of sight; then he crossed the road and entered the Rising Sun. As he had expected, it was nearly full of curious gossippers standing around the bare marble counter and seated on the benches which lined the walls. It was a motley scene, and difficult for an outsider to look upon without a shudder. But Thornton, though his quiet glance round had taken in at once the whole character of the place, sat slowly sipping his brandy-and-water with all the careless stolidness of a *habitué* of the place. No one there could have guessed that that quiet, insignificant-looking man who sat there with half-closed eyes was listening with sharpened senses and never-ceasing vigilance to every question and answer, to every chance remark and opinion which was bandied about him. He had not asked a single question or betrayed in any way the least curiosity about the subject which was being so fiercely discussed. He had come to the conclusion that he would in all probability learn more by sitting quite still and listening than by asking questions. And he was right.

What he heard soon stimulated an interest which had not previously been very keen. He had read of this murder, and had dismissed it from his mind as one of a certain type with no special features about it. Probably he would have forgotten all about it had it not been for Lord Alceston, an old schoolfellow and fellow-member of a certain Bohemian club, one of whose unwritten rules it was that among the members there should be a certain mutual aid society, a give-and-take of such

services as one had it in his power to render the other. Stephen Thornton had a certain notoriety of his own as a powerful writer of extreme Radical views, and as a man who, *rara avis*, etc., was very much in earnest about his politics. But apart from this, he was noted as a lover of strange adventures of the genuine Bohemian type and as a wonderful amateur detective. So, after much trouble, thought and deliberation, Lord Alceston, remembering certain services which he had once been able to render this man, went to him at his rooms late on the day of his father's funeral and asked for his aid.

This was the case, he said, briefly put. On the same night, and within a few hours of the time of his father's murder, a nameless woman had been murdered in an obscure part of London. Something there was—he could not say what—which seemed to faintly suggest the idea of some connection between the two murders. He could not take his information to Scotland Yard. Scotland Yard would want to know more than he was willing to tell. This circumstance, slight though it was, was one which he would not on any account risk letting the newspapers get hold of. He would not tell it to Scotland Yard; he would not even tell it to the man whose aid he was asking. That was the case. Would Thornton help him? All he wanted was if possible to see the face of the murdered woman and learn something of her antecedents. Alone he knew not how best to set about doing this. Would Thornton help him, by his advice or in any other way?

Thornton had promised to help readily enough. In his own mind he had at once set the idea down as preposterous. But he had asked no questions, and he had given no opinion. Simply, on starting out he had put down their errand as a wild-goose chase, and had felt no interest in it beyond the desire to render a service to his friend.

As he sat in the sanded drinking-bar of the Rising Sun, however, his ideas began to change. He began to get interested. This affair had features in it of

which he had been ignorant. Most of his previous conclusions were evidently erroneous. He cleared his mind of them and began to consider the matter from an altogether different point of view.

In the first place the woman, notwithstanding her surroundings, notwithstanding her evident poverty, had in one particular always maintained her self-respect. No one had ever seen her speak to a man, no one had ever heard her speak of them, save with contempt. Yet on the night of her tragical death three men had visited her one after another—the first time that such a thing had ever happened; and one of these must have been her murderer. Of no one of them had any accurate description been given. All three were strangers to the neighborhood, and at least two were, at any rate from the landlady's point of view, gentlemen.

The conversation veered round to her appearance and probable antecedents. Concerning the former there were different opinions, the men mostly taking one side and the women the other. But apart from the actual question of good looks, all were agreed upon one point—she was not of their class. Her hands and feet, the poise of her head, and her manner of speech, were all commented upon. The latter was almost foreign to them, but they knew the ring of it. She had been a lady, and while she had lived they had hated her for it. Even now some of the women uttered brutal sneers when they spoke of it. She had been no better than she should have been, or how had she drifted there among them? Curse her and the likes of her.

There were endless repetitions, maunderings, and quarrels. Now and then there was a blow struck, and the combatants, screaming and cursing with horrible oaths, were ejected to "have it out" outside. The main subject was sometimes quitted for the retailing of some filthy yarn, greeted with shrieks of hideous laughter from the women, but in the end some new arrival always brought it back again into the old channel. And Stephen Thornton sat there still, slowly sipping brandy-and-water, and with half-closed eyes and hands stuck deep

in his pockets affecting the maudlin state of a half-drunken man.

A new-comer started a point which Thornton had already labelled in his mind as important. Who was the man who had had her buried? Why hadn't the parish buried her? She had died without money. Who had found the "brass" for the funeral?

There were plenty ready to answer. It was a man who had come to try and identify her, and had recognized her face as that of a lady whom he had once seen abroad. He did not even know her name. He knew nothing about her, in fact. He had been struck with her appearance and had offered to have her buried decently. That was all.

Thornton weighed it over in his mind. Had it been a man of whom he had known nothing he might after inquiry have believed it. But it so happened that although he had not mentioned the fact to Lord Alceston, the man in the mourning coach was no stranger to him. He thought it over deliberately, and he came to this conclusion—that Monsieur de Feurget knew more, much more, about this woman than he chose to tell the world. Perhaps he was one of those three visitors; perhaps even he himself was concerned in the murder. At any rate he was a person to be watched, to be suspected, through whom a clew might eventually be obtained. The conversation surged on, and every now and then Thornton heard things which interested him. There was not one there who could say that she or he had ever even exchanged a word beyond the most casual remark with the murdered woman; but there was some one, it seemed, who had been almost friendly with her, who, more than one hinted, knew something of her past and of her real position. At last the name was mentioned—Sall Greenwood—and Thornton betrayed the fact of his being a listener by a slight start, which, fortunately for him, no one noticed. Sall Greenwood and Monsieur de Feurget! Here was something to work upon. Thornton's interest was growing rapidly.

The man with the yellow beard and the long coat was

brought up and eagerly discussed. Every one had something to say about him, but there was only one woman who could declare definitely that she had seen him. She had been in the Crown and Thistle when he had entered, and she had seen him talking to Betsy Urane, and she had seen him, she declared with a whole string of vehement oaths designed to crush incredulity, about twenty minutes before his arrival at the Crown and Thistle, coming out of a ready-made clothes shop, at the corner of the street. Her description of him was very much the same as Betsy Urane's. He was short, roughly dressed, with a light, flowing beard, and most of his face smothered up with a blue handkerchief. He had spoken and walked like a gentleman, and had seemed free with his money.

Presently a woman, seeing that Thornton's eyes were wide open, came and seated herself beside him. With an effort he overcame his instinctive repulsion, and did not discourage her presence. There was something which he wished to find out, and she might be useful. He even answered her coarse greeting in kind, and made room for her on the bench.

"Any objections to a drink wi' yer, guvnor?" she inquired engagingly.

"No, I'll stand you one," he answered roughly. "I'll have another myself, too. It's dry work listening to all this gabble."

The drinks were ordered and brought. While his companion sipped hers approvingly Thornton looked her over. She was only an ordinary woman of her class, with a stupid, sensual face, without a single gleam of intelligence. There was no risk in questioning her, he decided.

"Did you know this woman they're making such a fuss about?" he commenced.

"No, nor didn't want to. A stuck-up wench she was."

"Seems a rum 'un, that she shouldn't have had a single pal," he remarked.

"She 'ad. She used to go and see Sall Greenwood. I've seen 'em together."

"Who's she? Is she here?"

"Here! not she! She's too fine to come to such like place. She's a —— little French tailoress, that's what she is, in Crane's Court."

He had got what he wanted now, and his only anxiety was to get rid of the woman beside him. He feigned to return again to his semi-somnolent state, and half closed his eyes. But she did not go. Presently he felt her hot, foul breath close upon his cheek, and immediately afterward a tug at his pocket-handkerchief. He let it go, hoping to get rid of her, but he was disappointed. Instead she commenced softly feeling for his watch. He shook her off and sat up.

The dull red angry color flushed into her cheeks. She had had too much to drink, and was inclined to be quarrelsome.

"It's my belief as you was only a-shamming!" she cried angrily. "You ain't been to sleep at all. You're a —— spy, that's what you are. I've been a-watching o' yer. I say, you chaps," she called out at the top of her voice, "here's a nobbler 'ere. Look at 'im. He's been a-shamming sleep, that's what he's been a-doing. He's a —— spy, a —— nobbler."

There was a low howl of drunken rage from a dozen throats, and shrill shrieks from the women. They made at him like wild beasts. The tables were overthrown, the woman who had pointed him out missed her footing and was trampled under foot. But when they looked for Stephen Thornton he had vanished.

CHAPTER XIV.

MOTHER AND SON.

THE funeral of the Earl of Harrowdean had been a great function. Statesmen of the highest rank and reputation had followed the deceased peer to the grave. Deputations from all classes of society had begged for leave to attend, and the most exalted personage in the state had herself been represented by a near kinsman.

England's most eloquent and learned prelate had pronounced a eulogy over his grave which had left scarcely a dry eye among the whole of that vast assemblage, and which had made the hearts even of strangers burn and throb with indignation against the cold-blooded assassin whose midnight crime had taken such a life. As a statesman, a philanthropist, a nobleman, and a Christian, the Earl of Harrowdean was held up as an example to his order and to all men. The names of those who pressed upon the bereaved widow and her only son their respectful, heartfelt sympathy included the names of all the noblest in the land, and the wreaths which poured in from Covent Garden, from the country, and even from foreign royalty, made the air of the great cathedral heavy with the perfume, and formed such a collection of floral offerings as had rarely before been seen.

When all was over, and the mortal remains of the Earl of Harrowdean had been placed under the earth, the public mind began to turn from sympathetic grief to strong resentment. The murderer must be discovered, must be hunted down, or the prestige of the English police was gone forever. All speculations as to his personal identity were put a stop to by Neillson's flight and continued absence. It could bear but one construction—guilt. Neillson was the name in every one's mouth who talked about the murder at all. Neillson was clearly and undoubtedly the murderer. Neillson must be discovered.

At first Scotland Yard had been very confident about the matter. His apprehension, it gave out, was only the matter of a few hours. He had had too brief a start to make his escape. Every railway-station in London and every port in Great Britain was watched by tried detectives, and to have shown himself at any of them must have been instantly fatal, however good his disguise. A cordon of police was drawn around the little house in Holloway where a married sister of his was known to live. His description hung in every police-station and had been flashed all over England along

the telegraph wires. A photograph was discovered among his effects, and in an incredibly short space of time a thousand were issued and distributed. The numbers of the missing notes drawn by the Earl of Harrowdean from his bank on the morning of his murder were in every bank manager's hands, and were on the bills which announced him as "wanting." Scotland Yard laughed at the idea of failure. Its plans were perfect.

But a day passed, two days, three days, and as yet nothing had been done. The day of the funeral had come and gone; and on the day after—the day of Lord Alceston's visit to his friend Thornton—a fresh placard was circulated throughout the country and hung upon every wall and hoarding in London. Lord Alceston had taken his friend's advice and followed his own inclination. He had offered one thousand pounds reward for the apprehension of Philip Neillson.

This had been done on the morning of his visit to the Bethnal Green Road; in the afternoon, after his return home, he was told that his mother wished to speak to him. He went straight to her room.

She rose to greet him, a tall, stately figure in her deep crape dress and widow's garb. Even her son, who was preparing for the battle which he knew was coming, could not restrain a thrill of admiration as he looked at her. She was still a beautiful woman. At forty-five—she could scarcely be less—she could still hold her own against women many years her junior.

Lord Alceston admired his mother, admired her very much indeed. With what other feelings he regarded her, however, he scarcely himself knew. Their relations had always been the relations of a society mother to a society son. They had been on friendly terms always, but then there had never been either occasion or opportunity for difference. At that moment, as she rose to meet him and they stood face to face in the dusky twilight of the darkened room, he had almost forgotten that she was his mother. The one thought in his mind was that this woman had some dim, secret knowledge—perhaps not knowledge, but at any rate sus-

picion—which she was refusing to share with him. It never occurred to him to suspect her of the least complicity in his father's murder, of any actual knowledge of the guilty persons; but still she knew something which might, if properly used, afford him a clew. What her reasons for withholding it might be he could not imagine—he did not try to. Simply he felt that if she did not meet him frankly and tell him all she knew she was no mother of his.

There was no attempt at any ordinary greeting between them. He stood on one end of the hearth-rug, upright and frowning, with his eyes bent searchingly upon her white marble face, as though striving to penetrate the mask which he felt convinced was the result of her unnatural calm. She stood facing him for a moment, her dark eyes meeting his without a quiver and her thin lips pressed tightly together. Then, drawing her skirts around her with a slow, graceful movement, she sank backward into the easy-chair from which she had risen at his entrance.

"You sent for me, mother," he said, shortly.

"I did. Thank you for coming so quickly."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You need not; I was as anxious to come as you could have been to see me. You have made up your mind to tell me."

"I have nothing to tell you. I sent for you for another reason."

"I am sorry to hear it. As to your having nothing to tell I don't agree with you. You could tell me a great deal. You could, if you chose, help me to clear up the mystery of my father's death, of your husband's murder."

"You are mistaken," she answered; "I know nothing."

"And if you did you would not tell me?"

"And if I did I should not tell you," she answered. "I am not revengeful. I am sorry to see that you are."

He had determined that he would keep his temper, and he kept it; but it was no easy matter.

"Revengeful is scarcely the word," he answered qui-

etly; "I want justice. But you did not send for me to discuss this. I suppose there was something else?"

"Yes, there was. They tell me that a reward has been offered for—for——"

"For Neillson's arrest," he interrupted quietly. "Yes, I have offered a thousand pounds reward."

She took up a fan and half hid her face as though to screen it from the fire.

"You are doing a foolish thing," she said. "You know that Neillson could not have had anything to do with it."

"On the contrary," he answered, "it is very clear that he had something to do with it. I will not say he was the actual murderer; perhaps not. But one thing is very certain—he knows all about it."

"If you find him he will not tell you."

He smiled incredulously. "We shall see about that. The law will have a hold upon him."

There was a brief silence. Then, with a sudden, swift movement she rose from her chair, and before he had time to make up his mind what she was about to do she was on her knees before him, her dark eyes gleaming with tears and her features convulsed with a sudden storm of passion. Her hands clasped his knees—her whole attitude was one of wild abandonment. The change amazed him. He would have started backward but she would not let him go. He stood looking down at her dishevelled face, and listening to her passionate words, with a strange sense of unreality creeping over him. Surely this could not be his mother, this weeping, suppliant woman.

"Bernard," she cried, "for God's sake listen to me! I beseech you, I warn you for your own sake, as well as mine, let it all rest. Leave it to the detectives. Don't let them find out anything if you can help it. Don't help them. Withdraw that reward. Oh, you don't know what you're doing! You can't know! Have you thought anything about it at all? You cannot think that he was murdered for that miserable money! Oh, this will kill me, will kill me!" she cried, wringing her hands.

He tried to raise her, but she would not move. She grovelled at his feet, and her agony brought the tears into his eyes. Strong in his purpose though he was, he could not help being moved.

"Mother," he cried, trying in vain to lift her, "if he was not murdered for that money what was he murdered for? Can you tell me that?"

"Yes, yes!" she cried. "I could tell you, but God knows that I would sooner die at this moment, here at your feet, than that you should know."

"There is a history, then—a secret—and you know it?"

"I know nothing; but I can guess. Bernard, listen to me. Think of your father as the whole world thinks of him; think how every paper is full of his praises; remember that sermon yesterday. They hold him up as an example to his order and to all men—honest, virtuous, loyal, a Christian, all that a man should be, almost without a fault. What should you think of the man who taught them to think otherwise, who pointed to some dark spot in his life which none had known of and which made men retract all the good which they had spoken of him, and shake their heads at the very mention of his name? What should you think of such a one?"

"Think of him! I should curse him from the bottom of my heart!' cried Lord Alceston bitterly.

"Then, Bernard, be careful lest you should be that one. You seek to penetrate the mystery of his death. You may drag into the light fragments of a past which no lips save his could rightly explain, and which unexplained might damn forever his memory in men's thoughts. Oh, listen to me! Don't turn away! Let me warn you! You are the earthly trustee of his reputation. Blameless or sinful, there is a part of his life from which the curtain must never be lifted, least of all by clumsy, unthinking fingers groping in the dark."

Her voice had gathered force, had risen from a nervous, tremulous whisper to an impassioned cry, which

seemed to fill the darkened room and which rang and burned in his ears with strange thrilling effect. He moved a little away from her and looked into her wild beautiful face, on which the firelight was casting strange lurid gleams, half fascinated, half frightened. Resistance, anger, entreaties, he had steeled himself against. But this was something different. There was the ring of truth in her passionate words. What did it all mean? What could it mean?

"Mother, I cannot believe this!" he cried at last in a low, hoarse tone. "You—you must be dreaming. My father's—his life has been a public one before the eyes of all men. There could have been nothing behind it. Oh, it is horrible sacrilege to hint at such things! I can never believe it."

She rose slowly to her feet and moved away till her dark figure was almost lost in the shadows of the room. His eyes followed her wonderingly. When she returned she held in her right hand a small black book.

"You are hard, Bernard," she said, "very hard to convince. See, I swear that every word I have uttered is truth. If you go on with your search, and if you succeed, you will blacken forever your father's memory. I do not say that this will be justice. I do not say that ever in his life he committed knowingly one single sin. But if you discover anything at all, you will discover but a part. The other part could only be explained by lips which are silent forever. The sin, or what will seem like sin, you will publish to the world; the justification the world can never know. As I live this is so. I swear it. I am your mother, Bernard, and I swear it."

"Then if it be so," he answered, "I must know all. Then I will judge for myself. I must share your knowledge, mother, whatever it may be."

She threw herself back in her chair with a little hysterical cry and covered her face with her hands.

"I cannot tell you," she moaned. "I can never tell you."

"You must either tell me, or—or——"

"Or you will go on with your purpose?"

"I shall."

She made no reply. For several minutes there was a deep silence in the little apartment. Then, as though rousing himself from a deep fit of abstraction, he drew himself up and pushed away the high-backed oaken chair against which he had been leaning.

"Mother," he said, "you have nothing more to say to me? I am going."

She let him reach the door before she spoke. Then her voice, weak and shaking, barely reached him, and seemed like a whisper from a long distance. He turned around at once. She was standing upon the hearth-rug, leaning heavily against the mantel-piece and with a ghastly look in her white face.

"You have brought this upon yourself," she said, speaking hoarsely and as though with great difficulty. "Come here—closer, closer."

He moved to her side, and in obedience to the nervous clutch of her fingers upon his coat sleeve bowed his head until it was almost on a level with her lips. Even then she looked uneasily around the room before she spoke, her dark, unnaturally brilliant eyes travelling restlessly around it and lingering suspiciously in every dark corner.

"No one can possibly overhear you, mother," he said, a little impatiently, yet awed in spite of himself by her strange manner.

Her white quivering lips almost touched his ears. They moved, slowly, at first, then quickly, and the words streamed out in a hoarse agitated whisper. They ceased and she drew back, frightened and gasping to watch their effect. His face was suddenly white and haggard, and great beads of perspiration hung upon his forehead. But blank incredulity struggled to the front, and expressed itself in a frantic, passionate tumult of words, which seemed as though it must overwhelm all opposition. She listened, and the white pitiless lips moved again. Then there was silence, deep intense silence, broken only at times by her low, spasmodic sobbing. It was the sobbing of a broken heart. Nothing could be worse than this. He knew.

CHAPTER XV.

THE REWARD WITHDRAWN.

A FEW minutes before midnight Stephen Thornton rang the bell of the great house in Grosvenor Square and asked to see Lord Alceston. He was shown at once into a small study on the ground-floor and in a few minutes was joined by his friend.

Thornton was not a man of keen sympathies, nor was he naturally an observant man. But when he saw Lord Alceston enter the room he rose to his feet with a quick exclamation.

"My dear man," he said, in a pitying tone, "how ghastly bad you look! You ought to be in bed. I'm sorry I came so late; I ought to have put it off until to-morrow."

Lord Alceston sank into an easy-chair and shook his head.

"I'm glad you did not put it off. I have been expecting you. I shouldn't have gone to bed if you hadn't come. I am anxious to hear what happened after I left you."

"I'll tell you directly. May I have a brandy-and-seltzer first, though? I've come straight from Whitechapel."

"Of course."

Lord Alceston rang the bell and the brandy-and-seltzer was brought. Thornton helped himself and passed a tumblerful across the table.

"I'll not speak a word until you have drunk that down," he said. "Why, your lips are blue, and you are shaking all over. Is anything fresh the matter?"

"No; that is, nothing of consequence. I'm not very well."

He took up the tumbler and drained it. Thornton took out a cigar case and passed it to him.

"Try one of these. You'll find a smoke will do you good," he said. "There, that's right. You look more yourself now. Do you know you quite frightened me

when you first came in. And now for my news, such news as it is. It's a wonder I'm here to tell it. They took me for a detective or a spy down at the Rising Sun and wanted to mob me. Only just got off."

"Ah!" Lord Alceston made no further remark and Thornton continued:

"I haven't been altogether unsuccessful. In the first place, I know the name of the man who had her buried and who attended her funeral. Here it is—Leopold de Feurget, Chandos Street," he said, throwing a piece of paper across the table.

Lord Alceston's fingers closed upon it and he nodded. To all appearance he might have been a quite uninterested listener to Thornton's recital. But Thornton was used to studying men's faces and he knew that it was otherwise.

"Of the three men who seemed to have visited the woman on the night of her murder I have found out nothing as yet of importance. Yet what I have heard is mysterious. This murder was no common one, Alceston. Nor were those visitors common men. I have made no inquiries in this direction yet. Scotland Yard will have done all that, I dare say."

He looked across at his friend as though fearing that he would appear disappointed. But Lord Alceston did not appear disappointed.

"I have been making inquiries in another direction," Thornton continued. "From the talk which went on in the tavern I learned that there was one person with whom the murdered woman had occasionally talked and who was supposed to be to a certain extent her confidante. I went to see that woman."

"Did she tell you anything?"

"Not much. But she astonished me more than I was ever astonished in my life."

"How? What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you. I found her in an attic working at her trade. A tailoress she is. She absolutely refused to answer one of my questions. I offered her money—a

good deal of money—but she still refused. Just as I was leaving her she called me back.

"'Who was the young gentleman with you in —— Street to-day?' she asked. I saw no reason for concealment, so I told her your name. 'Tell him,' she said, 'that if he will come to me alone I will tell him all I know about the murdered woman.' I couldn't get another word out of her, nor any explanation; so I came away. Her name and address are on that piece of paper, too—Sall Greenwood, 4 Crane's Court, Fitchett Street, Whitechapel."

Lord Alceston's fingers closed over the piece of paper, and he transferred it to his waistcoat pocket. Then he resumed his former position, his face half shaded with his hand.

"Anything else?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Important?"

"Very."

Lord Alceston changed his position uneasily.

"What is it?" he asked.

Thornton leaned across the table and looked very grave indeed.

"I discovered something—almost by accident—which seems as though it were, indeed, a link between the two murders."

"And the link is?"

"Neillson."

Lord Alceston drew a long breath and the color came back to his cheeks.

"Tell me about it," he said.

"That's very soon done. It seemed to me that the cross-examination of Mrs. Judkin, the landlady, at the inquest, was very weak, and as I passed the house on my way back I went in and saw her."

"Yes?"

"I frightened her."

"Yes?"

"And I made her acknowledge that she had secreted something which she had found in the dead woman's room."

"Yes? What was it?"

Thornton took a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket and threw it across the table.

"A fifty-pound note," he said quietly, "and the number is 202,096."

Lord Alceston repeated the number as though not appreciating its significance.

"Don't you remember," Thornton said, "that is the number of one of the notes which your father, the Earl of Harrowdean, drew from Coutts' on the morning of his murder, and which Neillson evidently decamped with?"

Lord Alceston grasped the note tightly in his fingers and sat back in his chair. For a moment or two the room seemed to be swimming round him and there was a low buzzing in his ears. Then he felt a cool hand upon his forehead and some brandy streaming down his throat. With a great effort he pulled himself together and sat up.

"I'm all right, thanks," he said weakly. "I'll sit quite still for a minute or two."

There was a short silence. Then Lord Alceston got up.

"Thornton," he said, "I asked you to help me in this, and you've done so like a brick. I'm immensely obliged to you."

"That's all right," Thornton answered. "I'm glad we've been so fortunate. We've made a good start, at any rate."

"And the start must be the finish," Lord Alceston said slowly. "Thornton, I want to drop this, drop it altogether. I want what we have found out to remain a profound secret, buried between us two."

Thornton was a man whom it was not easy to surprise, but he started and looked at his friend incredulously.

"Do you mean this?" he asked slowly.

"I do."

"You mean to say that now the clew is in your hands you want to throw it up? You don't intend to follow it?"

"I do mean that. I have the strongest reasons."

"What are they?"

"I cannot tell you, Thornton. You must take my word."

"You may be mistaken. You may have got hold of some false idea."

"I am not mistaken."

"I'm not at all sure that we shouldn't be liable to be indicted for conspiracy."

"I will take the risk of that."

Thornton thought for a moment, and then shrugged his shoulders.

"Very good; you are the most interested in this matter, of course, and you shall have your own way. But I tell you frankly that I don't understand this and I don't like it. Good-night."

He left somewhat abruptly, for he was annoyed; and he was one of those men who never take the trouble to hide their annoyance. But Lord Alceston knew that he would keep his word and he let him go without further protest.

On the following morning the papers contained a somewhat strange announcement. The reward of one thousand pounds for the discovery of Philip Neillson had been withdrawn without any explanation. The inference was obvious. The authorities no longer believed in his guilt, and though Scotland Yard was not supposed to be affected by the offering of the reward at all, the search for the missing man became weak and half-hearted. The one possible clew was swept away, and the murderers of the Earl of Harrowdean and of the unknown woman in the East End were still at large. The papers had plenty to say about it, and Scotland Yard very little. The chief inspector of the latter was worried almost out of his senses. But perhaps Stephen Thornton was of all men the most perplexed.

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. BRUDNELL'S ADVICE.

THERE were very few family solicitors in London of higher standing than Mr. John Brudnell, of John Brudnell & Sons, Bedford Row. The names on the piles of tin boxes which lined his private office from floor to ceiling were most of them familiar by their greatness, and never failed to inspire awe in the minds of a casual caller or a fresh client. On one of the largest and most prominent of these was painted in large letters the name of the Earl of Harrowdean. Mr. Brudnell, his father, and before him his grandfather, had managed successfully and carefully the affairs of the Alceston family, and Mr. Brudnell himself had been admitted to terms almost of intimacy with the deceased peer. Consequently the lawyer was by no means surprised on his arrival at the office at ten o'clock on the morning following Lord Alceston's interview with his mother to be told that the young Earl of Harrowdean was waiting to see him in his private room.

If he was not surprised Mr. Brudnell seemed by no means eager for the impending interview. He stepped slowly back into the street and dismissed the trim little brougham which had brought him from his luxurious little villa at St. John's Wood, and then, instead of immediately re-entering the office, he strolled for a minute or two slowly up and down the pavement with downcast eyes and with his hands folded behind him. He was a man of tall and commanding presence and with nothing about his personality, at all events, of the typical lawyer. But none the less he enjoyed a great reputation in legal circles for shrewdness and acumen, and the confidence of his clients in his advice was most flattering. But though Mr. Brudnell was a man of the world, and was possessed of an almost unlimited experience in the management of his clients, for once in his lifetime he felt in a quandary. Of course there were a hundred matters on which the Earl of Harrow-

dean might have come to consult him—but supposing it should be that! How was he to get out of it? What explanation or answers could he possibly give? At best he could cut but a poor figure, unless he lied, and strange though it may appear, notwithstanding his profession Mr. Brudnell never permitted himself to deviate from the strict truth. He had often anticipated some such interview as this, but although he liked always to be prepared for any emergency, he had never been able to formulate any satisfactory scheme for dealing with it. As he stood reflecting for the last time on the steps of his office he could see only one course to take, and it was by no means a pleasant one. It might cost him his post as legal adviser to the Alceston family, but there was no other course open to him, he decided, as he thoughtfully twirled his long gray mustache the last time and then turned into the office.

Lord Alceston was walking impatiently up and down his private room when he entered it. At the sound of the opening door he stopped short and turned round.

"Ah, good-morning, Mr. Brudnell. I'm an early visitor, you see."

"Very glad to see you, Lord Alceston, at any time," the lawyer answered, drawing off his gloves. "Won't you sit down? You'll find that easy-chair comfortable."

Lord Alceston took it and sat for a moment or two in silence, watching Mr. Brudnell while he carefully hung up his overcoat and hat and put the gardenia which he drew from his button-hole into a little vase filled with fresh water. Then he took a chair in front of his table and, turning round on it, faced his client.

"You have come to have a talk about the property, of course, my lord," he began. "There is a good deal about which I should like your opinion and instructions. The long leases on the Clanavon estate, for instance——"

"I did not come to talk about the estate, or anything to do with it," Lord Alceston interrupted. "My errand is a totally different one."

The lawyer looked into the pale, almost desperate face of the young peer and knew that what he feared was coming. But he did nothing to make the task easier for his client. He sat in absolute silence for several minutes and waited for the inevitable.

"What I came to see you about," Lord Alceston commenced slowly, "has reference to my father's private affairs."

"I thought so," groaned the lawyer to himself.

"Naturally, after I had recovered a little from the first horror of his murder, the first thing which occurred to me was a strong desire that the man who had committed this hideous deed should be found and punished. I felt, and I feel now, that I shall never rest until the rope is around the neck of the villain who committed that brutal murder. You are a man, and can scarcely wonder at this, I think, Mr. Brudnell."

Mr. Brudnell acknowledged gravely that the feeling was a natural one, and then looked away from the keenly flashing eyes which were fixed upon him with a little sigh and a presentiment of approaching trouble.

"Mr. Brudnell, I loved my father. Vengeance may be a most unchristianlike sentiment, but it is a very natural one. It has laid hold of me—has laid hold of me so completely that every other feeling seems swept away before it. I have sworn that the man who killed my father must die."

"Every one must hope that the police will succeed in their quest and that the wretch will expiate his crime on the scaffold," murmured the lawyer sententiously. "I was at Scotland Yard yesterday, making inquiries, and they seemed hopeful."

"D—— Scotland Yard!" said Lord Alceston impatiently, for the lawyer's tone as well as the mention of the place had irritated him. "I never expected that Scotland Yard would do any good."

"Then how, may I ask, did you hope that the murderer would be discovered?" Mr. Brudnell inquired.

"I meant to track him down myself," the young man answered fiercely. "Ay, and I mean so still. But be-

fore I had been able to take my first step even I receive what has been a great shock to me."

Mr. Brudnell said nothing, but waited for Lord Alceston to proceed. His face was generally as impassive as a face could be, but at that moment he felt it hard to conceal the apprehension which was drawing in upon him. Lord Alceston, watching him closely, saw it, and it made him the more eager.

"It is suggested to me, Mr. Brudnell—I will not say by whom, or how—that there may be in my father's past life some secret which would afford the clew to his murder. It is further suggested that about this secret there may be something, at least, of guilt, something for which at any rate the world would not hold him guiltless. I am told that this hideous crime may be the vengeance of some injured man, and that if I prosecute my search for him I may drag into life some disgraceful story of the past which will bring shame upon my father's memory. As though in support of this I am told a circumstance which happened on the night of his murder, which if generally known would at least cause scandal, and for that reason I am bidden, I am implored, to let the whole matter rest and to let the murderer go in peace."

"If there be any truth in the suggestions of which you speak, my lord," the lawyer remarked in a low tone, "the advice was good."

"But do you think that I believe in this—this——"

"The very best men have sometimes sinned in the days of their youth," Mr. Brudnell interrupted him.

"True, and if my father ever did so, I will not be his judge. But before I let his murder remain unavenged, I must know more—I must hear something more than suggestions."

There was a short silence. Seeing that the lawyer was not disposed to break it, Lord Alceston arose and, moving to the opposite side of the writing-table, stood facing hm.

"Mr. Brudnell, listen to me! If there is anything in my father's life which he kept concealed from the world, you are the one man who would know it. You

know that I am not here out of mere idle curiosity. If anything less depended upon it I would never dream of needless prying into his secrets. But what has happened alters all that. It is my duty to ask, and yours to tell, anything which can throw light upon this. I ask you a plain question, Mr. Brudnell; give me a plain answer. Have you any reason to believe that in following out my search for my father's murderer I run any risk of bringing to light anything which had better be kept secret?"

The lawyer did not hesitate for a moment. He looked straight into the pale, anxious face bending over toward his, and answered him:

"I have."

"My God!

Lord Alceston took a quick step backward, as though he had received a blow. He had come here quite expecting some such avowal, and yet, now that it had come, it came as a shock to him.

"You must tell me all about it," he said slowly. "I must know all."

"I cannot," the lawyer said.

"But I tell you that I will know!" cried Lord Alceston fiercely. "I will hear the whole story, and I will judge for myself what risk I run of bringing it all to light if I carry on the search for his murderer. Do you think that my vengeance can die so easily—can fade away at two words from you? I must know all."

"Never from me," said the lawyer.

"Then the shame be upon you," cried Lord Alceston bitterly, "if I do mischief; for I shall follow this thing out to the bitter end!"

The lawyer rose to his feet and held up his hand, for Lord Alceston had caught up his hat as though about to depart.

"Sit down, my lord," he said, "and I will tell you what I may."

CHAPTER XVII.

A GLIMPSE OF THE PAST.

"I DARE say you know," Mr. Brudnell commenced, "that your father had a long minority. He was an orphan at six years old, and until he came of age I saw very little of him. After then, however, he came to see me frequently, and although I was rather young at that time he honored me, I believe, with his full confidence. When he was twenty-two years old he left England on leave from his regiment for a year's travel. It was soon afterward that his troubles began.

"At first he wrote to me occasionally, but very soon he left off doing so, and I had no news of him for some time, except through his bankers. About a year after his departure I was sent for in great haste by the manager of the bank. From him I learned that your father had already overdrawn his account very considerably, and that afternoon another draft for a large amount had been presented by the agents of a foreign bank. What were they to do? Of course I authorized the payment of the draft, but I wrote to your father that night pointing out the position of affairs. By return I got a peremptory demand for a further large sum, to obtain which I had to sell out a quantity of very well-invested stock. I heard nothing then——"

"Forgive my interrupting you; but where was my father at this time?" asked Lord Alceston. Mr. Brudnell shook his head.

"That is just one of the things which I may not tell you. To proceed, I heard nothing more from your father for a month, and then news came to me in a startling manner. I had some friends dining with me one night, when word was brought in to me that a man wished to see me who would take no denial and who seemed greatly agitated. I made some excuse to my guests for a moment. In the little anteroom I found waiting for me, travel-stained and pale with excitement and fear, Neillson, your father's servant.

"I cannot tell you why he sought me, Lord Alceston. I can only tell you this—that his news was such that I left my house within an hour and travelled night and day until I reached your father. I was unsuccessful in my journey, and notwithstanding all my entreaties I was obliged to return to England alone. Your father professed unbounded gratitude to me, but the one thing which I begged of him he would not do. He was mad at that time, I think, or he would not have stayed in that place. But he did, and I had to come back without him. I did not see him again for three years, when he returned to England to take up his commission in the army. Very soon afterward he was married."

"What you have told me is the husk without the kernel. I want to know where my father was during his mysterious absence from England, and what was the danger from which you saved him. Do you mean that you will tell me no more?"

"I do, Lord Alceston. In this very room I gave your father my solemn promise that no word of it should ever pass my lips. I cannot think that you will urge me to break a promise which should surely be considered sacred to the dead."

"No, I cannot urge it," Lord Alceston admitted. "And yet, if he could have foreseen anything like this happening—it makes things so different."

"My lord," said Mr. Brudnell, "I was not myself wholly in your father's confidence. But, judging from what I do know, I should say that it makes no difference. My opinion is that he would rather his murder remained unavenged than that that page of his history should be read out to the world in the avenging it."

"That I shall try to judge for myself," said Lord Alceston, "for I shall try to find out what was written on that page. Then I shall use my judgment."

Mr. Brudnell shook his head. "It will be a sad waste of time, my lord."

"I am young and I can spare it. I must do something in this. I cannot sit down in idleness."

"You have my advice, Lord Alceston, the advice of

an old man and a man of the world, and one, too, who has the additional advantage of knowing far more about the matter than you do. Let the matter rest as it is. You can do your father no possible good by seeking his murderer. Revenge is only a sentiment and it is certainly not a noble sentiment."

"I do not seek revenge, Mr. Brudnell," said Lord Alceston, rising and drawing on his gloves. "I seek justice."

"It may be, my lord, that that has already been dealt out," replied Mr. Brudnell, also rising.

"What, in my father's death? Do you mean that that was an act of justice? Do you mean an——"

The lawyer laid his hand upon the young man's arm and checked him.

"Nay, my lord, I did not mean that. Have you ever thought what must be the state of mind of a murderer? Though he be a very devil there must be moments of fear, of remorse. A man's sin carries with it always its own punishment."

"It may be so, Mr. Brudnell. I hope that it is so. But I did not come here to discuss abstract questions of morality. As to the course I intend to pursue my mind is quite made up. Good-morning."

"Good-morning, my lord."

Mr. Brudnell attended his distinguished client to the outer door and then returned to his private room. There was a pile of business waiting for him and his head clerk was impatient for his instructions for the day. But Mr. Brudnell put them all off for a while, and, shutting himself up in his room, sat down in front of his table with a troubled look in his face. He had an odd habit sometimes, when he was perplexed, of talking to himself, and he found himself doing so now.

"I must see Lady Alceston at once," he said softly. "Perhaps she knows. I know there was nothing at Grosvenor Square, for I searched every drawer of the cabinet. If he has not destroyed them they are at Clanavon. I ought to have insisted upon seeing them burned. One always thinks of these things when it is too late. Per-

haps I had better go down there. Yes, that will be best. Let me see, to-day is Tuesday. I cannot go to-day; and to-morrow Lord Filgrave's case is on. It must be Thursday."

He took up a book of engagements, and crossing out several already entered, wrote "Clanavon" across the space opposite Thursday. Then he rang for his head clerk, and announced himself ready for the day's business.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A VOICE FROM THE CLIFFS.

High up on the summit of a long line of iron-bound cliffs frown the battered remains of what was once a great castle. Many hundred feet below a gray stormy sea, which even in the calmest of summer weather seems never at rest, dashes in with an unceasing melancholy roar upon the few yards of shingly beach and the worn cliff side. The country around and behind is a barren moorland, treeless and uncultivated and houseless. Only a keen eye could detect, right down in the shelter of the cliffs, a few red-tiled cottages huddled close together as though for protection from the wild, sweeping winds, and in front of them a few brown-sailed fishing boats, and here and there a net. Sometimes the fishermen cowered over a common fire and told wild, eerie stories—for they were North Country folk and superstitious. Sometimes they stood on the grinding shingles bathed in a shadow of salt spray and looked longingly but hopelessly out through the clouds of mist and storm to the sea to which they dared not trust themselves; and sometimes they all joined in laboring to repair the misfortunes of one of their little community, and mended a net, or a sail, or hammered fresh planks into the bottom of a leaking boat. It was a plain, rough, hard life, with many sorrows and few joys; yet they lived it without grumbling, and on the whole with quite as much satisfaction as many of their more fortunately situated fellows.

It is in the autumn when their lot seems hardest and the battle of life most severe; and it is mid-autumn now. A wild, gusty wind comes roaring over the unquiet German Ocean, furrowing the gray sea with mountainous waves, and dashing them in upon that little strip of storm-bound coast with all the fury of an army of angry demons cast loose upon the restless waters.

As the hours of night drew on, the thick pall of darkness which had been weighing upon earth and sea was pierced by the sudden appearance of the full moon from behind a thick bank of fast-moving black clouds. At the door of the cottage which supplied the place of an inn to the little hamlet stood Jim Doore, landlord of the same, tempted outside for a moment by the sudden appearance of the moon. Holding his pipe behind his back lest the wind should blow it into ashes and rob him of his last few minutes' stolid enjoyment before retiring for the night, he took a few cautious steps shoreward and looked around him. First he cast a long, anxious glance over the wildly tossing sea, and drew a long, deep breath of relief when he saw no trace of any craft fighting a vain battle with the elements—for Jim Doore was a humane man. Then he glanced up at the castle and noted the two glimmering lights which shone from different parts of it. At one of these he looked with indifference; on the other, high up in the uninhabited portion of the keep, he looked long with frowning brow and displeased mien.

"'Tis uncanny," he muttered between his teeth, gravely shaking his head. "I don't loike it! It bodes noa good, noa good."

He looked away and turned toward his cottage. Through the window he could see the cheerful blaze of a large fire and several men on a rude bench seated around it smoking. Closer still to the window was his wife, her hard, weather-stained yet comely face peering out into the darkness, with a shade of anxiety in it, looking for her absent lord. Suddenly she made out his burly figure, and called to him:

"Coom thee in out o' th' wet, lad! Coom on!"

The invitation was not one to be despised, especially accompanied as it was with a smile which was meant to be and was to him inviting. Jim Doore looked in at the cheerful fireside and into his wife's face, and drew a sigh of something which was very much like content.

He lounged forward, and in another minute would have been safe inside his door. But with his hand upon the latch he paused and stood quite still in a listening attitude. Was it his fancy, or had he not heard a faint shout from above, among the cliffs?

Suddenly a fierce gust of wind came tearing seaward and down the cliff side. This time there was no doubt about it. It carried with it the faint but unmistakable "Halloa!" of a human being.

Jim Doore was a devout Catholic, and the first thing he did was to cross himself. That operation performed to his satisfaction, he rapidly ran over in his mind the names of his few neighbors. There were twelve in all and five were in his rude parlor. The other seven he had seen during the evening, and knew them to be safe in their homes. The shout, faint though it was through the distance, was no woman's or child's. No one but a man, and a man with sound lungs, could have made his voice heard above the din of the storm.

Excitement was a rare visitor to Jim Doore, and when it came, it came slowly. But it was on the way now. Again came that faint "Halloa!" Setting his feet a little apart, and throwing his head a little back, he raised his hands to his mouth and sent forth an answering shout which scared a whole colony of sea-gulls and made the air beat and vibrate around him.

The cottage door was thrown open and its temporary occupants came trooping forth, Mrs Doore in the van.

"What be'ast a-doin', mon?" cried she. "Tha'st amost broak the windoa wi' tha' shoating."

He pointed up to the cliff side, which towered above them.

"Theer's a mon theer, lass. I tell 'ee I 'eard um shoat. Fetch t' lanthorn; we mun goa and seek."

"Summun on t' cliff? Why, noa, lad; they be all at whoam."

"I tell 'ee I 'eard um. Listen 'ee."

There was a silence, and sure enough the sound of another "Halloa!" reached them from above. There were murmurings of amazement among the little group—almost of fear. Strangers never came to their little cluster of abodes, and this must be the hail of a stranger. Who could it be? What could he want with them? The little handful of men, slow-witted by nature and position, looked at one another helplessly. It was Mrs. Doore whose common sense first mastered her surprise.

"A mon it be surely, and if he be got off the paeth, he'll be nigh breaking his neck if you lads doan't stir yerself. Whoi doan't ye be up and foind 'im? Now then, Jim."

There was a stir among the men. and they prepared to move forward. Just as they were starting a sudden storm of wind and rain extinguished the lantern which Mrs. Doore had brought out, and there was a pause. When it was brought out relit the wind had increased to a hurricane. The storm which came raging in from the sea seemed to have gained fresh and redoubled vigor from the momentary lull. Far off came the sound of the breakers lashing themselves against the worn, jagged rocks, and nearer still the sea swept in upon the hard beach with a threatening, murderous roar, and, having spent its force, retreated, grinding the pebbles and shingles together till the air seemed rent with the screams of the "maddened beach."

"It's a terrible noight, lads!" shouted Jim Doore to his little band. "We mun keep together."

They moved off, keeping close under the shelter of the giant cliff which overhung their little cluster of homesteads, though even at that distance every now and then the salt spray from the foaming sea came dashing into their faces. At the foot of the winding path, from which the shout had come, they paused and joined hands before commencing the ascent.

"We mun howd on toight to one another, lads!" cried

Jim Doore. "If one o' them theer gusts cooms on we shall loike to be blowed roight ower into the sea. Noo then."

They commenced their climb, every now and then crouching down to avoid the fury of the storm. Presently Jim tried a "Holloa!" and it was answered immediately, with a distinctness which showed them that their quest was nearly over.

"Steady, lads," cried Jim, waving his lantern; "he be away theer to the roight!"

They turned down a narrow sheep-track which seemed literally to overhang the sea below, and made their way slowly along it with great care. In a few minutes Jim paused and held up his hand. The dark figure of a man confronted them, standing in the middle of the path.

"I've missed the path somewhere, haven't I?" he inquired. "I thought I was wrong somehow, but it was so infernally dark that I was afraid to try and find my way back again, and I didn't like going on either, so I shouted. Glad you heard me. Are you from the castle or from the village?"

"We be coom from down below," answered Jim, pointing through the thick darkness to where their few cottages lay grouped together. "It be lucky that you didn't try to get much forrader on this 'ere path, or you'd a-walked right over th' edge o' cliff. Wouldn't he, Bill?" he added, turning round to the foremost of his companions.

"Surely."

"That's just what I was afraid of," remarked the stranger. "Can any of you down there put me up for the night, or show me the way to Clanavon Castle?"

There was a distinct sensation among the little group of men. A visitor on his way to the castle! Such a thing was never heard of. Forgetting his manners in his curiosity, Jim raised his lantern, and for the first time had a glimpse of the stranger.

He saw a tall, finely-built young man, whose handsome face, notwithstanding the rain and storm and the

danger which he had certainly been in, was in no way discomposed; and apparently he saw something else too, for after a brief inspection he lowered the lantern and touched his cap with a gesture of respect.

"Yer 'onor a' ta'en wrong turn fer t' castle," he said. "A' should a' kept roight on, and never a' coom down this path. 'Tis a stiff clamb back agen, now, an' none ower safe."

"What am I to do, then?" the young man asked, shrugging his shoulders. "Can any of you put me up for the night?"

"If ya doan't moind roughing it, yer 'onor, down in moi bit o' a cottage, the missus——" began Jim Doore.

"Mind roughing it? Not I, my man. A good fire and a blanket are all I want. I'm wet through to the skin. Lead the way."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE STRANGER.

The little procession re-formed and commenced the descent, Jim Doore and the stranger leading the way, the others close behind. Once Bill Simpson, Jim's partner, managed to edge himself into the front line for a minute, and drew the latter a little on one side.

"Dost a' know who 'un be, Jim?" he whispered.

"I a' gotten some idea," Jim replied in a mysterious manner. "Keep a civil tongue in tha head, mon, and bid the others."

They had reached the little strip of beach, and were slowly making their way under the shelter of the cliff to the cottages. High up in front of them shone the two glimmering lights from the castle. The stranger looked at them curiously.

"What lights are those?" he asked, pointing upward.

Jim Doore's eyes followed his gesture, and he crossed himself again.

"From Clanavon Castle, yer 'onor," he answered.

"They seem a long way apart," remarked the other, looking up at them with interest. "Ah!"

Again the clouds had parted, and a brilliant flood of moonlight streamed down upon the wild little scene, glistening across the waste of tossing waters, and throwing strange shadows upon the towering cliffs. But the most striking object of all was the castle; and the stranger stood with his eyes fixed upon it, scarcely caring to cast a single glance at the remainder of the panorama. High up above them the gloomy pile, with its frowning ramparts, its ruined towers, and its massive keep, stood out boldly, the magnificence of its situation heightened by the weirdness of the light, the hour, and the storm. Midway down the flagstaff the remains of the flag, tattered and torn almost into strips by the gale, were still streaming in the wind, floating against a background of light oily-looking clouds which hovered over the castle, and against which every tear and almost the very pattern was distinguishable. It was a fine sight, although a gloomy one.

Jim Doore looked steadfastly at the two lights, and then, turning round, pointed them out silently to his companions. There was a little murmur of superstitious awe, and each man crossed himself.

The stranger looked on in surprise.

"Why do you do that?" he asked curiously.

"Reason enoo, yer 'onor," Jim answered slowly, and dropping his voice to an impressive pitch. "Dost a' see yonder loight, the fur un oot theer in the tower?"

"Yes! What of it?"

Jim shook his head.

"'Tis no flesh and blood that boides theer, or that kindled that loight."

The stranger smiled the easy, sceptical smile of the sturdy materialist, to whom such statements seem only the weak superstitions of an ignorant, uneducated peasantry. He said nothing, but that smile was enough. The whole of the little body of men were up in arms. Their castle ghost was a familiar idea to all of them. There was not one of them who did not firmly believe

in its existence. For a stranger to come among them and affect incredulity appeared to them very much in the light of a discourtesy, which each one was prompt to resent. The young man checked them, however, by holding up his hand.

"Look here!" he protested. "You shall tell me all about your ghost when we get inside. I'm wet through to the skin, and cold as well. Push on, my worthy guide, and let us get beneath this roof of yours."

"Roight, roight, sor," was the good-humored answer. "We bean't so fur, neither."

They turned a corner of the cliff, and the little cluster of cottages nestling close up to its side lay right before them. From the window of Jim Doore's abode there shone a pleasant, warm light, reflected from the roaring fire which his wife had been making up in anticipation of a visitor. The stranger saw it and quickened his pace.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "if that isn't the pleasantest sight I've seen to-day. Is this your house?"

Jim pushed open the door with his foot, and ushered in his guest with a rough gesture, which was meant for a welcome.

"Doan't 'ee stan' out noa longer in this cold, yer 'onor," he said. "Coom thee in, by t' foire, and my missus shall find 'ee some dra cloathes. Get thee by t' fire. Missus! Missus! We a' found 'im—'twas a gentlemon as a' lost his way t' the castle. Coom thee and bring ma' Sunday cloathes. Why, dang it, lass, what is ta staring at?"

During the first part of this speech Jim had been busy stirring up the fire and otherwise arranging for the comfort of his guest, whose clothes were steaming in the warm blaze. But toward its completion, somewhat surprised at the non-appearance of his better half, he had turned toward the door and had received something of a shock. Standing on the threshold was his wife, with her eyes steadfastly fixed upon the stranger, and her hands raised to her temples. There was an expression in her face which, during his many years of

wedded life, Jim Doore had seen nothing of before. Her cheeks were colorless, her dark eyes were full of horror, and her whole attitude was that of a woman paralyzed by the sudden appearance of an unlooked-for danger. The young man at the fireside, unconscious of her scrutiny, leaned forward toward the blaze, which shone full upon his handsome face, and appeared to be making himself decidedly comfortable.

She made no answer to her husband's impatient question. She stood there quite still, her lips trembling a little and her eyes still fixed upon the face which was glowing in the ruddy firelight. Her husband repeated his impatient question, and the stranger turned carelessly round in his seat, as though mildly wondering what had provoked it. His movement seemed to effect what her husband's words had failed to do. She moved slowly forward into the middle of the room, and her face resumed its usual expression, save for a slight shade of pallor.

"They're down here in the corner, Jim. I thought as they might be wanted. Would this gentleman like anything to eat?" she added, hesitatingly.

"Anything to eat!" he repeated, turning a good-humored, smiling face upon her. "My good woman, there is only one word which would explain my condition at the present moment. I'm starving—literally starving! Forgive the question, but what have you got in the house?"

"Not much that's fit for you, sir, I'm afraid," she answered, quietly. "There's a bit o' bacon, and some fish—the fish is fresh and good if you like it, sir—and I could get you some tea."

"I should think I do like fish!" he answered her. "Let me have some, by all means, and some tea; and I'll try the bacon, too. What a lucky thing for me you heard that shout, my good fellow! Now, where can I get into these things?"

"Here, sir, by the fire. Jim'll come with me into the back room. I've got a fire there, sir; and your supper won't be long."

She turned away and her husband followed her. Presently she returned with a clean white cloth on her arm and commenced making preparations for the meal. Her guest had attired himself in the clothes which she had provided, and, overcome by the pleasant warmth after his long exposure to the wet and cold, had sunk down in his chair and was dozing. Once or twice she glanced across to him, and then seeing that he was really asleep she moved softly over to his side and looked down into his face. In her husband's rough clothes his fair boyish face looked all the handsomer by reason of the contrast, and as she looked into it she felt a lump come into her throat, and her heart beat fast. Again there came that sensation of fear. Why had he come? What was the meaning of it? If only she dared ask him!

Her husband's heavy footsteps outside warned her of his approach, and she retreated to the table, still holding her hand to her side, as though in pain. Presently he entered bearing in his hand a smoking dish and a kettle from which the steam was issuing in a little cloud. The tea was soon made, and when all was in readiness they awakened their guest. He sprang to his feet at once and drew up his chair to the table with alacrity.

"I've actually been dozing, have I?" he exclaimed. "I should have thought that hunger would have kept me awake. Mrs. Doore," he continued, "your fish is excellent. I never tasted better."

"I am glad you like it, sir," she answered. "It's about the only thing we have fit to offer you."

"And the tea is delicious," he added, setting down his cup. "I feel a different man already."

Once or twice during the meal the door was softly opened and some one would put a head in and retreat with an awkward apology. At first the stranger seemed puzzled, but before long the truth began to dawn upon him.

"Mrs. Doore, is this an inn?" he asked.

"It be, sir. Surely."

"And those men want to come in, of course. Let them in at once, Mrs. Doore. I insist upon it."

"Won't they annoy you, sir?" she asked doubtfully. "They're but rough sort o' chaps like, and——"

"Not another word, Mrs. Doore, but let them come in. I should be sorry to monopolize the whole room."

She moved to the door and called to them. One by one they came in and seated themselves around the wide fireplace, each making some sort of clumsy salutation to the stranger as they entered.

"My good men," he said pleasantly, when they had all entered, "I am much obliged to all of you for coming to look for me. Fill up your glasses, and remember," he added, turning to Jim Doore, "whatever is drunk to-night is drunk at my expense."

There was a murmur of thanks and general brightening up in the little circle. In a few minutes the stranger had finished his meal, and, drawing his chair after him, joined the circle. From the pocket of his coat, which was stretched out before the fire, he drew out a morocco case and lit a cigar. Then, stretching himself out in his chair, he turned to the landlord.

"Now, Mr. Doore," he said, "I'm ready to hear all about that mysterious light up in the castle and all about the ghost. Fire away."

CHAPTER XX.

JIM DOORE'S STORY.

JIM DOORE cleared his throat once or twice and settled himself down to his task with the air of a man who knows that he has a good tale to tell and intends telling it well. His listeners, notwithstanding that they all save one knew quite as much as he did about it, and had heard it told and had told it themselves and discussed it many a time, drew their chairs round in a half circle and manifested the liveliest signs of interest.

There were two figures in the background—the stranger and Jim Doore's wife. The former, notwithstanding his grotesque attire, which fell in strange lines about his slim, graceful figure, looked every inch an aristocrat,

and a handsome one. He was leaning very far back in an ancient but comfortable easy-chair, with a fragrant cigar held between two very white fingers, from which the blue smoke was curling upward in a long straight line. His thin lips were slightly parted in an amused smile, and his clear blue eyes were wandering round the little scene, as though keenly appreciating the oddity of his situation. But beneath it all there was a melancholy cast about his countenance, which it seemed impossible to trace to any one feature, and yet which was certainly there. As a portion of the background to the picture he was distinctly striking.

Not less so was Mrs. Doore, though her appearance was scarcely so picturesque. She was sitting some little distance behind the circle, in a corner where neither the firelight nor the lamplight penetrated, so that her face was in the shadow. Upon her knee was a piece of needlework, to which she was paying no attention whatever, for both her hands had closed upon it, while she was leaning forward like the others toward her husband, her dark eyes glowing in the occasional gleams of firelight which fell upon them. Perhaps a casual observer glancing around, and noticing her twitching fingers and rapt silence, would have come to the conclusion that she was the person who was waiting for Jim Doore's story with the greatest interest.

But as she must have heard it many times it would seem scarcely probable.

The preliminary silence had lasted quite long enough. Recognizing that fact by several faint signs of impatience on the part of his audience, Jim Doore cleared his throat once or twice and commenced:

"You must know, first of all," he said, addressing the stranger, "that yon castle is called Clanavon Castle, and belongs, or leastways it belonged, to the Earl of Clanavon. You've heard of him, noa doubt, sir?"

The stranger nodded. "I have heard of him," he said quietly.

"Well, he wor a great man in Lunnon, and they do

say he was always very hard at work on something or other. He looked almost like that."

"He used to come down here sometimes, then?" interrupted the young man for whose benefit—ostensibly—the story was being told.

"That's just what I was going to tell 'ee. Though he was one of the hardest-worked men in Lunnon, and was a Parliament man, and wrote books, and a' that, every two or three months he used to come down here for a few days—sometimes a week—for a sort o' rest. In t' summer he'd coom in a steam yacht; but anyways, however he coom, it was always unexpected like. He never let un know afoorhand. There be one room in the south tower which he used to use, and it was allus kept ready for him, summer and winter, and all times. It be that room," Jim added, dropping his voice a little, "in which you seed the light burning."

"Then who uses it now?" the stranger asked. There was a low chorus of mysterious ejaculations. Jim shook his head in a mysterious manner and crossed himself.

"I'll tell 'ee all as is knowed, sur," he said. "When the earl wor here, night after night, we used to see that light burning till daybreak, while he sat a-working with his papers and such like. Just about at daybreak it used to disappear, and then we knew that he'd gone to bed. He used to sleep till about middle-day, and then he'd come out shooting among the rocks, or sailing a little skiff in the bay, or mayhap fishing till evening again. He used to enjoy himself quite simple like, allus alone; but he used always to look a powerful sight better after a few days here."

"Was he always alone here, then?" the stranger asked.

"Allus. There's never been no visitor to the castle in our time. You see it bean't kept up for a company place like. It be all in ruins, except a room or two. Well, it was about—about how long ago wor it, missus?" he asked, turning to his missus.

"About six months," she said quietly.

"Ah, about six months it wor," Jim continued.

"About six months ago, me and the mates got back from a spell o' fishing, and we see the light in the earl's room. Very bright and powerful it wor. Well, of coors, we all thought that the earl had come down for a spell, and in the morning me and Bill Foulds there, we ups and goes to the castle to see if any fish was wanted. There be only two on 'em up there to look arter the place like—Mrs. Smith, a decent old body she is, and her brother, old Joe Craggs, who's but a poor half-witted loon. We went round to the bit o' entrance at the back and straight into the kitchen. Mrs. Smith was not there, and after waiting aboot a bit we goes into her little room, and there she wor sobbing and going on awful. I thought in coors as 'ow the earl had come unexpected like and found her unprepared, and had been a-giving it to 'er. So I sez: 'What's oop, Martha? 'As he been a-going on aboot summat?' 'Has who bin going on?' she says, a-looking up surprised like. 'Why, the earl,' says I. 'We seed as he was back by the light in the south tower last night.' 'There warn't no light,' says she, a-shaking all over, and clopping 'er hand to a' soide. 'Oh, but there wor,' said I; 'Bill and me, and every one on us, we all sawd it as bright as ever could be. When did he coom?' Then she says never another word, but after looking at me for a minute in a way as makes me shiver to think on, she just falls back'ards, and goes off into one o' them there faints. Lor, wot a job me and Bill 'ad wi' 'er; didn't us, Bill?"

The gentleman appealed to withdrew his pipe from his mouth and blew out a cloud of smoke.

"A' reckon we did, Jim," he assented vigorously.

"Well, arter a undoin' of 'er, and pouring pailfuls of cold water over 'er, and pulling feathers out o' t' old cock's tail to burn under 'er nose, and such like means, we got 'er round, but very weak and dazed she seemed. Of coors, directly she could speak we asks 'er wot was up.

"'T' master,' she says, 'master!' 'Well,' says I, 'wot aboot 'im?' 'He's dead,' she whispered. 'Dead!' cried both on us. 'Why a wor 'ere last night, surely. Dead!'

"'Ay, murdered!' she whispered in an awful tone like.

"'Wheer?' asks Bill, reg'lar skeered.

"'In Lunnon,' she says, 'day afore yesterday.'

"I couldna seem to believe it, hearing it so sudden, and I wor all dazed like.

"'But t' loight last noight?' I said to 'er.

"She pointed to the key which hung upon the wall, and a sort o' cold chill ran through me when I sees it, for there was cobwebs all round and on it.

"'That key,' she says, 'ain't been moved from that nail for nigh on two months. It wor t' master's orders when he wor 'ere last time that the room wor not to be touched till he coom again.'

"'But we all seed t' loight,' I says, 'me and Bill, an' all on 'em.'

"She wor white to the very lips, and her voice wor all o' a tremble.

"'No one a-been in t' room. If the loight were theer, God help us all! 'Twor no earthly hand as lit it.' "

CHAPTER XXI.

LORD ALCESTON IS PUZZLED.

THERE was a short silence among the little group. The stranger alone was looking more thoughtful than impressed.

"The light has been seen often since then?" he asked, after a few minutes' meditation.

"Ay, moast noights."

"And are you sure that there is no other entrance into the room save by the door of which you saw the key?"

"Noa; there bean't no other way in."

"Mrs.—what did you say her name was—the housekeeper? She couldn't have anything to do with it, or her brother?"

"We a' seen it when both on um a' been doon 'ere wi' us."

"It's a strange thing," the young man remarked thoughtfully. "I wonder whether it's alight now?"

He moved toward the door, and they all trooped after him. Jim Doore, stepping in front of his guest, lifted the rude wooden latch, and a gust of wind came howling in, extinguishing the lamp which he carried in his hand, and causing the few prints and texts which hung about to rattle against the wall. Bill Foulds, followed by most of the party, turned back to the fireside with a muttered anathema against the folly of exposing their comfortably-warmed selves to the fury of such a tempest until their time came to go; but Jim Doore and his guest stepped outside, closing the door after them, and stood for a moment with the rain beating in their faces, and the gale shrieking about their ears, gazing at the huge black outline of the ruined castle, high up above them. There was no mistake about the lights. One, faint and glimmering, low down on the inland side, Jim pointed out as coming from "Martha's" room; the other, high up in the tower, right on the verge of the cliff, was burning with a steady, brilliant light and was even casting a long, livid reflection on the bleak, angry sea below. They looked at them steadily for a minute. Then Jim Doore, who was holding the door fast in his hand, pushed it a little way open, and followed by his companions, re-entered the cottage.

They moved their chairs and made room for the stranger by the fire, and he stood there warming himself after the brief exposure to the storm, with the dancing firelight lighting up his thoughtful countenance. They looked at him curiously, wondering what he would say now about their mysterious light, and wondering, too, as they had been all along, who he was and why he had come to this out-of-the-way corner of the world. And there was one among their number, a woman, who sat where she had been sitting all the evening, unnoticed and almost unseen, whose dark eyes never once left his face, and from whose cheeks every vestige of color had fled at his coming. She, too, was wondering and dreading.

"'As ta seen t' loight, Jim?" Foulds inquired, removing his pipe from his mouth out of deference to the stranger, for it was not his custom when speaking.

The young man started somewhat, as though the question had broken in upon some train of thought.

"Yes, it's there, right enough," he answered. "If it wasn't such a wild night I should feel tempted to go straight away into that room and solve the mystery. But since it has puzzled you all so long it may as well do so for one day longer. To-morrow night I will see into it."

There was a stir among the little group.

"Dost a' think that Mrs. Smith'll let a' go into the room?" Jim Doore asked doubtfully. "There's never no stranger passes inside o' them walls. God A'mighty!" he exclaimed suddenly, springing to his feet and standing with his eyes fastened upon the stranger's. "Look at 'ee!"

"What's the matter, Jim?" cried his partner, also rising to his feet and following Jim's shaking finger, which was pointed straight at the tall young man, who stood calmly before the fire.

"Look at 'ee, I tell a'," repeated Jim. "'Tis t' earl's own face!"

Every eye was fixed upon the stranger, and suddenly every one became conscious of the resemblance—every one, that is to say, except Mrs. Doore, who had possibly known all about it before, for she never moved a muscle of her face.

"As I don't want you to think me a ghost," the young man said, smiling slightly, "perhaps I had better tell you that I am Lord Alceston—Earl of Harrowdean now, I am sorry to say."

"T' earl's son!" gasped Jim Doore.

"Exactly."

There was an awestruck silence, which Lord Clanavon broke.

"I can assure you you've no need to look so frightened," he said, pleasantly. "You've all been very kind to me, and I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you all."

This speech had the effect of setting them all a little more at their ease, but the impossibility of sitting down in the same room with an earl was manifest to all of them. With every description of clumsy but respectful obeisance they dwindled away one by one, while Jim Doore stood by looking helplessly from his wife to his distinguished guest.

"Come, come, Doore; there's nothing to be frightened about," Lord Alceston said, smiling, when the last of them had departed. "I'm sure you've all been very kind to me. I might have been up on the cliff now if it hadn't been for you. Look at your wife, now; she's a sensible woman. She doesn't look a bit disturbed. Well, if you won't sit down again"—for Jim had rigorously declined the chair which his lordship had kicked toward him—"show me where I'm to shake down for the night and I'll go to bed."

Mrs. Doore silently took up a candle, and opened the inner door, revealing another apartment beyond.

"This way, my lord," she said quietly. "I've done my best to make things comfortable, but I'm afraid you'll find it rather rough."

Lord Alceston followed her into the tiny apartment, which, small though it was, was spotlessly clean and neat.

"Nothing could be nicer," he declared. "Good-night, Mrs. Doore. 'Pon my word," he added to himself, looking round approvingly, "that's a very superior woman."

CHAPTER XXII.

A NIGHT JOURNEY.

Mrs. Doore doubtless was a very superior woman, for it was quite evident that she had learned one hard lesson for the uneducated to acquire—to conceal her feelings. Directly the latch was securely drawn, the distinguished visitor safe in his room, a remarkable change took place in her appearance. The unnatural calm was gone. She sank into a low chair opposite her husband,

her rigid features working with emotion and her trembling hands stretched wildly out.

"Oh, Jim, Jim, what shall I do?"

He looked at her a little astonished. As far as he was concerned he was begining to feel very much more at ease—in fact his momentary alarm was fast diminishing, and was being succeeded by a sort of vague elation. After all, the affair was more likely to turn out to his advantage than the reverse. The events of the evening passed slowly before him while he had been waiting for his wife's reappearance, and on the whole the result was satisfactory. He had neither done nor said anything that would be likely to give offence to the young earl, although a cold shiver passed through his frame when he reflected how many dangers he had unwittingly avoided. They had rescued the young lord from what was undoubtedly a most dangerous situation, and they had treated him all the time with the sturdy North Country hospitality which was one of their chief characteristics. When his wife had joined him he had been quite prepared for some mutual congratulations; now she had come out white as a ghost and trembling in every limb. Jim scratched his head in wonderment.

"What be amiss, lass?" he inquired.

She leaned forward and stared at him wildly, as though she had not heard his words. Jim began to feel thoroughly uncomfortable.

"There bean't nothing wrong, lass, surely?" he said.

"Let me be a few minutes, Jim," she moaned. "Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

He lit a pipe as the only possible consolation which lay in his power. It was the best thing he could have done. Presently she rose, and walked softly up and down the room, her husband following her movements with his eyes, but maintaining an unbroken silence.

"Jim," she said, suddenly stopping in front of him, "I've been a good wife to you."

He looked up at her and was startled at the change in her face. Usually a healthy-looking woman, the ruddy brown with which sea air and sun had tanned

her cheeks had fled altogether, leaving them ghastly pale, and her dark eyes were literally blazing with some excitement.

He nodded slowly. "A' hast, lass! I've nowt to say agen that."

"Then ask me no questions to-night. Reward me by trusting me now. I must go out—and alone!"

"Go oot—aloan!"

"Yes, Jim; up to the castle!"

He held up his fingers. "Listen to t' wind," he said; "the storm has nae blown itself out yet."

"Storm or no storm, I must go," she cried passionately. "I must see mother."

The thing suddenly became clear to him. His wife evidently feared that in some way her mother had disobeyed or was disobeying orders up at the castle, and wished to warn her of her master's forthcoming visit. "Had it anything to do with the mysterious light in the south tower?" he wondered.

"Let Oi take a message," he said. "It's no noight for a' to go."

"I must be my own messenger," she cried. "Oh, Jim, for God's sake let me go! let me go!"

She had sunk on her knees before him, and was clasping his knees. Jim thought no more of exercising his marital authority.

"A' shall go, lass! A' shall go!" he cried. "Dry thy een! A' shall go! Coom, and a'll get 'ee the lantern."

She rose to her feet with a sigh of relief, and fetched her hat and cloak. Her husband opened the door and handed her the lantern. He did not feel quite at his ease about this midnight expedition.

"Let a' coom wi' ye, lass, to t' gate. A'll coom no fearther. I doan't like thee going aloan."

"Not a step, Jim!" she cried. "I'll not be long."

She vanished into the darkness, and Jim, after keeping the door open for a minute or two, and gazing after her undecidedly, stepped back into the room, shaking his head.

"I doan't like it," he muttered, taking down his pipe,

"but she mun ha'e her way. She be a woman, and she mun ha'e her way."

Which showed that Jim, rustic though he was, had some claims toward being considered a village philosopher.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MRS. SMITH IS WARNED.

Mrs. Doore was never quite sure afterward how she accomplished her journey that night, but accomplish it she did, and in less than an hour she stood underneath the huge castle walls. The rest of her task was easy. An ordinary farm-yard gate led over what had once been a moat into the inner court-yard, upon which the windows of the inhabited portion of the building looked. Here she paused for a minute, and taking up a pebble, threw it sharply against a window directly opposite. There was a brief interval of suspense; then a light appeared, the window was opened, and a woman's head slowly appeared.

"Is there any one there?" she called out softly. "Who is it?"

Mrs. Doore drew a little nearer the window.

"It is I—Annie!" she cried. "Let me in, mother."

"Annie! Annie! At this time of night! What has happened? What do you want?"

"Let me in and I will tell you, mother!" she cried. "Quick!"

The head was withdrawn, and soon there was the sound of heavy bolts slipping back from the great oaken door, and the clanking of a chain. Then it was opened a little, and Mrs. Doore slipped inside with a sigh of relief.

Her mother took up the lamp, which she had placed upon the floor, and held it high over her head while she looked anxiously into her daughter's face. Both women were as pale as death, but of the two Mrs. Smith's appearance was the more ghastly. Her gray hair was

streaming down her back, and her thin, sharpened face was all tremulous with fear, while the long, bony fingers which held the lamp shook so that it seemed more than once about to slip from her grasp. She stood there with her eyes eagerly scanning her daughter's terror-stricken face and bedraggled appearance, but it was some time before she could frame a question.

"What is it, child?" she asked at length, in a low, shaking whisper. "Danger?"

"Ay, mother, I fear so, or I should not be here at this time of the night. Lord Alceston——"

"He is not coming here?" cried her mother.

"He is here—at our cottage."

"My God!"

There was a moment's silence. At first Mrs. Smith had tottered, and had seemed about to faint. Her daughter moved quickly to her side, and, supporting her with her arm, led her to a chair.

"What does he want? What has he come here for?" she asked hoarsely. "Does he know?"

Her daughter shook her head.

"I cannot tell; I think not. They told him about the light, and I watched him all the time. He showed no sign."

"Perhaps he has only come to see the place," Mrs. Smith said slowly. "He has never been here."

"It may be so; but he has seen the light. He will want to go into that room. You must go and warn him at once, and get everything ready."

The old woman began to tremble again.

"What shall I do if he stays long?" she exclaimed, wringing her hands. "Oh, I shall go mad; I know I shall."

"Nonsense, mother; you mustn't talk like that. Nothing will happen if you are careful. You must not let him stir from his room while Lord Clanavon is here, not for one moment."

"Come stop with me, Annie—do!"

"I will, mother, I promise you, if he stays. But I must get back now at once."

"How came he to your cottage?"

"He had lost his way on the cliffs, and Jim and the lads found him, and brought him down. It was a fortunate chance. Now, mother, I must go. Remember when he comes to-morrow you know nothing about his being close at hand."

"I shall remember. But, my child, you are wet through to the skin. Have a little brandy—or shall I make Tom light the fire and get some tea?"

"Neither, mother. I must go this minute. Look, morning is breaking already."

Far away over the restless gray sea faint streaks of white light were breaking through the dark clouds, and were casting a lurid, ghastly coloring upon the waste of waters. Side by side mother and daughter stood for a minute, watching the struggling morning dawn upon the storm-tossed waves. Directly the faint gleams of light had triumphed Mrs. Doore wrapped her shawl around her and turned to go.

"Remember, mother," she said, "it is for his sake. Be careful! Send for me as soon as you like after he has come. Good-by now."

Mrs. Smith drew herself up.

"Have no fear, Annie. Now that I am prepared, the danger is less. I must go to him now and prepare him."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CHAMBER IN THE TOWER: A DISCOVERY.

It was nearly mid-day when Lord Clanavon, breathless with his climb, stood before the heap of ruins which centuries before had been the ancestral home of his family. Before making any attempt to discover the inhabited portion of it he clambered up on to the outside wall and looked around him.

It was not a cheerful prospect, by any means, that he looked upon. The iron-bound cliffs, against which the gray sea came thundering in, looked cold and forbidding and lacked any form of vegetation to soften their

threatening aspect. The country inland, as far as the eye could see, looked barren and uncultivated—a succession of dreary, houseless wastes. The castle itself, or rather its remains, were in complete accord with the surroundings. There was none of the picturesqueness of most ruins about its crumbled walls and bastions. All the sadness of decay was there without the softening hand of beauty to gloss it over. Not a sprig of ivy or even lichen had grown upon the bare stonework. The fierce sea winds had done their work, and had added desolation to destruction.

He clambered down to terra-firma, and, making his way toward the inhabited portion of the building, he saw for the first time a tall, rather fine-looking old lady in a straight black silk dress standing in the oaken doorway. As he approached she made him a respectful inclination of the head, and looked inquiringly at him.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Smith," he said. "I suppose you are Mrs. Smith?"

"That is my name, sir," she said quietly.

"Ah, I thought so. I think we have never met before, but you have heard of me. I am Lord Clanavon."

She looked at him and sighed.

"'Tis easy to see that, my lord," she said. "I'm very glad and proud to see you; but it's a poor, miserable place to come to. Will your lordship come in?"

He followed her into the hall, looking curiously around him. She opened the doors of the two rooms opening out from it, and showed him them.

"These are the only habitable rooms, except the one in the south tower, my lord," she said.

He looked around him, and felt wofully disappointed. Everything was dreary and common-place, and in the last stage of decay.

"I should like to go to the room in the south tower," he said. "Isn't that the part of the building which my father used to inhabit when he came here?"

"Yes, my lord. There was no other part fit for him."

"It seems strange to me that he should have come here at all," Lord Alceston remarked, strolling to the

window. "I had no idea that the place was such a complete ruin."

"I think his lordship used to come here now and then when he had work to do which needed complete quiet," she said. "There were no interruptions to be feared here—no gentlemen to call in and see him, and take up his time. The place is healthy, too, my lord, and the fishing is very good."

"So I suppose," he answered. "Fishing is not a favorite sport of mine, though, especially sea fishing. I never have any luck. By the bye, Mrs. Smith, your face reminds me very much of somebody I've seen lately. Who is it, I wonder?"

If he had been watching her closely he could scarcely have avoided noticing the quick start and the sudden movement of her hand to her side. But he had strolled to one of the other windows, and his back was turned to her. Besides, he was very little interested in the matter.

"I don't know, my lord, I'm sure," she answered slowly, "unless it may have been Mrs. Doore."

"Of course. Mrs. Doore it was," he assented. "A most respectable woman she is, too. What relation is she?"

"My daughter."

"Indeed! Ah! I can see the likeness quite plainly now," he said, turning round. "Fortunate for you, you have relations here. It must be very dull. And now suppose we have a look at the south tower."

"Certainly, my lord; there is the key," pointing to where it hung, covered with cobwebs and dust, on a rusty nail. "It has not been used since his lordship was here."

He followed her down a long passage which smelt very mouldy, across a vast room—once a banqueting hall, now partly open to the skies—up some steps, and along another corridor, in the walls of which were great clefts, through which he could see the gray sea rolling beneath. At its extremity they came to a great oaken door studded with nails.

"This is the door of the room, my lord," she said,

clutching the handle, for the strong salt wind was roaring through great fissures in the roof and walls, blowing her stiff skirts around her and carrying her voice far away.

Lord Alceston looked downward, and almost at their feet saw the little cluster of fishermen's cottages where he had passed the night, looking like dolls' houses some six hundred feet below. The sight reminded him of something. He drew in his head and looked curiously at the solid door before him.

"Is there any other key to this door, Mrs. Smith?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Certainly not, my lord; you have the only one."

"Then this door has not been opened since my father was here last?"

"It has not, my lord."

He took off his hat, and held it in his hand, while the wind played havoc with his fair hair, which he kept less closely cut than most Englishmen.

"I suppose you've heard about the mysterious light which is supposed to shine from this room at nights?" he said.

"I have heard that there is some story of the sort about among the fishermen, my lord," she answered. "They are a superstitious race."

"So I suppose. But there certainly was a light burning last night which appeared to come from this tower," he said. "How do you account for it?"

She pointed to the flagstaff a little to their right.

"In very stormy weather, my lord, I have sometimes hung a lantern there as a sort of signal. I have a relation who owns coal ships at Mewlton, and I promised him that I would do so."

"Was the lantern there last night?"

"It was, my lord."

He looked puzzled for a minute; then he shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

"I might have known it was something of this sort," he said. "Now for this room."

He turned the key which he had already fitted into the lock, and slowly, with much effort, the door opened. The first thing he noticed was that their entrance had disturbed several cobwebs which had hung about the door and in the keyhole, and that a thick layer of dust upon the floor was pushed away by the movement of the door.

"That settles it still more conclusively," he remarked. "Proof positive, you see, that this door has not been opened for months."

He stood on the threshold and looked about him curiously, even eagerly. The room was quite a small one, hexagonal in shape, and lit by windows at each side. The furniture was much more modern than any which he had seen about the place, and there was plenty of it. A Turkish carpet covered the floor and several old prints and one or two oil paintings hung upon the walls above the oak panels. There was nothing in the least degree extraordinary about the room, except its incongruity with the rest of the place.

"Shall you be making any stay here, my lord?" Mrs. Smith asked.

"Not I," he answered. "I am in search of some papers which belonged to my father, and which I thought might be here—that is why I came."

"The desk and bureau are just as he left them, my lord," she said softly. "I hope that you may find them. I will send you some luncheon here—such as we can get, about one o'clock. And about a bed, my lord?"

"Bed! Oh, I'm not going to sleep here, thanks," he said. "I've sent one of the men from down below there to Mewlton for a fly. I expect it will be here about five."

She turned her face away that he might not see her relief. Then she left him, closing the door after her.

Lord Clanavon listened to her retreating footsteps until they died away in the distance.

"There's something very queer about that old lady," he said to himself, thoughtfully. "She wasn't in the least surprised to see me. She trembled when I spoke

of that mysterious light, and yet pretended to despise it; and she couldn't conceal her delight when I told her that I wasn't going to stop. And how she reminds me of some one, too, besides Mrs. Doore. Can't think who the mischief it is, though."

He stood for a few minutes buried in silent thought. Then he moved toward the writing-table, which stood facing one of the windows, and sank into the chair directly in front of it.

There were loose papers lying about, many of them covered with memoranda in his father's handwriting. He took one of them up reverently. It consisted of notes for an article in a review. He tried another. It was a criticism of a recent remarkable novel. These were all interesting and must certainly be preserved; but they were not what he had come to look for. He put them on one side and commenced turning out the drawers.

The Earl of Harrowdean, admirable public servant though he had been, had not been by any means a methodical or orderly man in his private affairs. Lord Alceston recognized that fact to his sorrow directly he commenced his search. Bills, receipts, invitations, begging letters, letters of congratulation, and political letters from the chief of his colleagues, were all bundled together in an incongruous heap. At first, he had intended to sort them as he went on, but he soon desisted from the attempt and contented himself with merely glancing through each bundle of papers and then throwing them on one side.

At last he had examined every drawer but one, and that one none of the keys which he had brought with him would open. As soon as he had assured himself of this, he looked about him for means of forcing it open, and, finding no other, he took up the poker, and with one blow fractured the woodwork of the drawer. Through the opening thus made he drew out a little bundle of letters and a photograph. Directly his fingers closed upon them he felt that his efforts were about to be rewarded.

He laid them before him without undoing the broad, black ribbon which bound them together. Was it not, after all, almost like sacrilege to look at them? It seemed to him that they were somehow sacred—sacred to the dead. If his father were living would he have them opened? And yet, on the other hand, it was no curiosity which was prompting him. He had no wish—he rather felt a shrinking from any attempt—to bring into the light of day a past which his father had left buried. But there were other things to be thought of. There was guilt to be punished and a hideous crime had gone unpunished. There was more, too; there was a vague suspicion floating in the mind of one person at least too horrible to be breathed, too horrible for him to accept even for a single second. But a time might come when it would be better that he could of his own knowledge turn upon it the ridicule which it merited. The time might come when, as well as avenger he might have to play the part of defender, and it would be well for him to be prepared. He hesitated no longer. It seemed to him that his duty lay plain before him.

And yet his fingers trembled a little as he untied the ribbon. It seemed to him so like desecration—so like doing a mean action for expediency's sake. But it must be done—it was done. The six or seven letters, yellow with age, and emitting a faint musky perfume, lay open before him, and the photograph was in his hands.

It had been taken out of doors—probably by an amateur—for there was no photographer's name at the back, and no address. But it had been very well taken. Many years old though it must have been, the figures were still distinct and unfaded, and Lord Clanavon felt a strange sensation creeping over him as he gazed at them. It was his father—he knew that in a moment; but the woman! Who was she?

His hand trembled a little as he laid it down. His mind had been full of something of this sort when he commenced his search, but the discovery was a shock to

him. He told himself that he had expected it, that if he had not found it he would have been disappointed. But none the less in his heart he knew that it was a great shock. He, himself, was no Puritan, but there were some sins, taken often as a matter of course by young men in his position, to which he had never stooped. He had no very high ideals of life, and it had been, perhaps, somewhat a selfish one—at any rate, only negatively good. But he had a strong sense of right and wrong, and a strong will to back up his knowledge; and while his life was only negatively good, it had ever been positively bad. And so this photograph and those letters breathing out a faint delicate odor of some unknown perfume seemed very terrible to him.

He looked again into the face of the woman who was standing with her hand resting upon his father's shoulder. Yes, she was beautiful; there was no denying it. There was witchery in those large full eyes and in the delicate curve of the little mouth, witchery in the fair hair which floated around her oval face and in the tall, supple figure. Whether it was the face of a good woman or no it was the face of a beautiful one.

He took up one of the letters and opened it with less reverence than he would have done had he not seen the photograph. As he read, his cheeks burned with a sort of shame that he should be reading what was so evidently only meant for the eyes of one—and that one his father! It was a passionate love-letter, written in French, and signed simply, "Cecile."

Two others were in the same strain, and similarly devoid of anything which could help him in the least. Toward the close of the third, however, there was a passage which he read twice over:

And you will be here the day after to-morrow. Ah! it seems too great happiness to think of it! How I long to see you, Bernard, and how weary the days have seemed when you have been so far away, and I have been shut up here alone with *mon père* and with Marie! There have been so many things to worry and perplex me. One of these I must tell you, dearest, and—you will not be cross with

your Cecile—I must ask you a favor. It is about Marie, Bernard. When you first came to see us I almost fancied sometimes that it was for her you cared. You talked to her so often—much oftener than to me, and, Bernard, I think that she fancied so, too. Her whole manner has changed to me, since—you know when. I fear that she is jealous; nay, I know it. She seems to think that I have stolen your love away from her. Tell me, Bernard, dearest, is it so? Did you ever care for her?

. . . . . .

My father is much brighter, and says that his trouble has passed away; and, Bernard, he says that it is you who have made him so much happier. I fear that you have been sending him money, and, dearest, I wish that you would not; it all goes like water. It seems as though he were born to be in difficulties; and though it is very sweet to me in one way to think of you as being our preserver, still it makes me ashamed and unhappy. You give all, and what return can you have? Only my love, and that is yours forever and ever in any case.

There was another letter—the last of the packet—written in a different handwriting, and very much shorter than the others. Its first sentence was a shock to him, greater by far than any which he had yet received. Unlike the others, it was dated and bore an address:

18 Rue de St. Pierre, Paris, May 5, —8.

My sister Cecile died yesterday afternoon in my arms. It was her wish, a few hours before the end came, that I should send for you, but as it was impossible that you could arrive in time, I did not trouble you. The messages she left fell upon deaf ears, as you may be sure that you will never receive them from me. Had she lived a little longer she would doubtless have lived to curse your memory, as I do. Marie.

P. S.—I enclose a copy of her death certificate.

But the greatest surprise of all was to come. There remained one more paper in the little bundle, and surely the most important was last. It was a copy of a marriage certificate between Bernard Clanavon, bachelor,

and Cecile Maurice, spinster, at an English church in the suburbs of Paris, thirty years ago.

. . . . . .

Lord Clanavon sat for more than an hour deep in thought. He had unearthed a secret which greatly disturbed him and which did not throw the faintest light upon his quest. This early marriage of his father's was a thing long since past and buried. If there had been no marriage, and if she who signed herself Cecile had been living, there might have been a clew; but as it was the whole thing was like a story finished, a page turned over forever. After so long a lapse of years what could have survived from this apparently ill-fated marriage which could in any way have cast a shadow so far into the future? As he folded the little bundle of papers up and placed them in his pocket Lord Clanavon felt that he would have given much never to have found them.

There was nothing else to examine in the room. He strolled aimlessly around, looking at the pictures and out of the windows at the fine sea view. As he turned round he trod upon a newspaper, and with a very weak curiosity he stooped and picked it up. At the first glance he knitted his brows, perplexed, and turned it over rapidly. Then he gave a quick start of surprise, and a sudden flash of excitement flashed into his eyes.

"By Jove!" he muttered, "there's some mystery here, after all. Eight months, Mrs. Smith tells me, this room has been locked up, and on the floor here is last week's *Times!*"

CHAPTER XXV.

"THANK GOD THAT HE HAS GONE!"

For some time Lord Clanavon stood with the paper in his hand doubtful how to act. Then he quietly dropped it again where he had found it and strolled away to another part of the room. When Mrs. Smith entered,

a few minutes later, with the luncheon tray, he did not even mention the subject.

"Not at all an unpleasant room, this," he remarked, as she commenced setting out the things; "but where did my father sleep when he came down here?"

He was watching her very closely, and he could detect a slight uneasiness in her manner as she answered, after a moment's hesitation:

"In here, sir. There is a sort of chair bedstead stands in my room, and he used to have that brought here. If you are spending the night here, my lord——"

"I am not," he interrupted. "I shall be leaving this afternoon."

It was impossible for Mrs. Smith to altogether conceal her relief. Lord Clanavon noticed her changed aspect, but he made no remark.

"This is a very queer old place, Mrs. Smith," he remarked.

"It is, my lord, very old-fashioned, and I'm sure the damp is something awful. In the wet weather I'm most of the time down with rheumatics. For them who's not used to such places it must be most unhealthy."

He turned away to hide a slight smile.

"I'm not surprised to hear it, Mrs. Smith," he said gravely. "By the bye, when I was a youngster I used to hear some queer stories about the place—or was it my fancy? Aren't there some secret rooms in this tower, and a passage leading somewhere or other? I fancy I used to hear my father talk about them."

He had strolled away to the window, but had carefully placed himself opposite a small mirror. In it he saw the sudden start which had set all the ribbons in her cap rustling, and watched the deadly pallor creep into her wrinkled face. It was enough for him. He forbore to turn around, and stood idly gazing out of the window, as though the matter were of small interest to him.

"It must be—a mistake, my lord. I have never heard of any."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Very likely. If you have never heard of any it must have been. Well, I'll have some luncheon now, and then finish looking through these papers. I expect a fly or carriage of some sort here about four o'clock. Will you let me know when it is here, and bring me a cup of tea?"

"Certainly, my lord. Is there anything else I can do now?"

"Nothing, thank you, Mrs. Smith. Your chickens look very good, and the air has given me an appetite. Where did this claret come from?"

"Your father had it sent here, my lord, several years ago. There is a great deal of it in the cellar."

"I'm very glad to hear it," he answered, emptying his glass. "I think I'll have it sent back to London, as I don't intend coming down here again. It's too good to lose sight of. There's nothing else at present, Mrs. Smith."

"Very good, my lord. I'm sorry you'll find there's no bell; but I'll come for the tray in half an hour."

She left him alone, closing the door carefully after her. When she returned he had finished his lunch and was seated once more at the writing-table. This time, as he appeared to be busy, there was no conversation between them. She cleared the things away in silence and departed.

He waited until she had got out of hearing before he moved. Then he lit a cigar, and, opening the door, walked out into the corridor connecting the tower with the main building. A few yards down it there was a great fissure in the inland wall. He leaned over this, and folding his arms upon the stonework looked thoughtfully at the tower.

Two things struck him about it: First, that taking into account the small size of the room which he had just quitted, the walls must either be of extraordinary thickness, or there must be some hollow space between; secondly, that from its great height, and the fact of the only room in it being right at the top, it had probably been built for a watch-tower. The last theory made the

possibility of the existence of any secret rooms about the place somewhat unlikely. Yet it seemed a very feasible one; for a strong light burning in that little chamber at the top of the tower would cast its reflection far over the sea which rolled in to its very base.

If there had been time, and if he could have been sure that Mrs. Smith was not watching him, he would have liked by some means to go down on the beach below, and examine the tower from its base. But glancing at his watch, he saw that there was scarcely time for this, so he determined to put the plan which he had previously determined upon into execution. He walked back into the room, and, throwing away his cigar, carefully examined the walls on the north side. He tried them inch by inch all the way along without result. They were perfectly solid stone and mortar. He looked all round the fireplace; it was even more unpromising. Then he tried the walls on the other side, though he hoped for a little from these, for from the window he could tell that there was not much space for a passage of any sort between the inside and outside of the wall. Finally he concluded his search with a shrug of the shoulders, and confessed himself beaten—for the time.

He lit another cigar, and sitting down in the easy chair, once more read through the little packet of letters which he had secured. They told him so little, and yet so much. He could scarcely see, now that he had them, how to act. It was all vague and unsatisfactory. In his heart he knew that he was sorry that he had found them. It was a chapter of his father's life which had better have been kept closed forever. Had it not been for that marriage certificate—had there been mention of an angry father or brother, of the disgrace which, save for that slip of paper, he might have brought upon that dead woman and her family—then it might have been possible to connect this incident with his father's murder, and thus he might have hunted down the assassin. But as it was it seemed to him impossible to do so. This was an episode, a startling episode, but it had

a finite ending. It was finished and done with. There was no point in it which he could lay hold of and follow out with any hope of its leading him to a definite clew.

Four o'clock came, and soon afterward Mrs. Smith knocked at the door and entered, carrying a small bag.

"The fly from Mewlton has arrived, my lord, and I have brought you your tea."

He drank it, then carefully locked up the writing-desk, and prepared to depart.

"I shall send down here some time, Mrs. Smith," he said, "for the papers in that desk. I will let you know when. Or perhaps I may write and ask you to forward them. You will be able to do that?"

"Certainly, my lord. I would use great care."

He drew on his overcoat, and then swung the key thoughtfully backward and forward upon his finger.

"Perhaps," he said, "until I do so I had better take the key and let Mr. Brudnell have it."

She seemed a little disturbed, and there was an anxious gleam in her eyes. But she struggled to hide it.

"It would be perfectly safe here, my lord, where you found it. I would not let it out of my sight."

"I don't doubt it, Mrs. Smith," he said, walking by her side down the corridor; "but lawyers are very particular sort of people, you know, and there are important papers in that desk. I think, in fact, I know, that Mr. Brudnell would prefer having the key himself."

"Very good, my lord." They passed through the gallery and the dreary succession of uninhabited and uninhabitable rooms, and out into the yard, where a closed fly, drawn by a pair of nondescripts—one pony and a horse—was waiting. Lord Alceston took his seat at once, and made his adieus to Mrs. Smith from the window.

"Good-day, Mrs. Smith. Much obliged for your attention."

"Good-day, my lord, and thank you."

She dropped him an old-fashioned courtesy and stood with a very forced smile on her lips, till the carriage drove off. As it vanished her whole appearance changed.

She had stood watching the vehicle with a fixed eager gaze, which changed the moment it finally disappeared into a look of intense relief. The tears glistened in her eyes and her lips trembled. It had been a great strain on her, but, thank God! it was over. He had gone. Thank God for it!

CHAPTER XXVI.

A SPRING DOOR.

THE carriage which was conveying Lord Alceston back toward more civilized regions had scarcely proceeded more than a couple of miles when its occupant thrust his head out of the window and called to the driver to stop. The man pulled up at once and turned round to find that his lordship had dismounted and was standing by his side.

"Look here, my man," he said slowly, "do you want to earn a sovereign?"

"I shouldn't make no objection to that, your lordship," answered the man, touching his hat with a broad grin of anticipation. By his accent and readiness of speech he was evidently no provincial.

"Very well, then, listen to me, and I'll tell you how," Lord Alceston continued. "I've altered my mind about going away to-day. Don't ask any questions, but just do as I tell you. Drive back to the inn, and simply say that you were not wanted, but are to come to the castle for me to-morrow morning. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, your lordship. Am I to drive you back to the castle now, or leave you here?"

"You are to leave me here. I shall return on foot."

"Very good, your lordship," the man answered, gathering up his reins.

"You can go."

"Very good, your lordship."

"Then why don't you start?"

The man touched his hat and smiled insinuatingly.

"There was a small amount to be earned, your lordship."

"And you want it in advance, do you?" Lord Alceston remarked, smiling and feeling in his pocket.

"Well, it's like this, your lordship," the man said, confidentially, "they might not put me on the job to-morrow, and then, you see——"

Lord Alceston handed him up the coin.

"There you are, then. You're no fool, I see. Remember to keep a still tongue in your head."

"There ain't no fear, your lordship. I knows wot I'm to say, and no more. I wish your lordship good-afternoon."

The man drove off and left Lord Alceston standing in the middle of the road. It was barely five o'clock, but it was already almost dark. Buttoning up his coat, he turned round, and with the wind in his teeth, started back toward the castle. In about half an hour he had reached the side of the cliff fronting the bay, immediately above the cottages, and about a quarter of a mile from the castle, which was now in full view.

He looked first at the tower. There was no light there. He drew a quick breath of disappointment, although it was only what he had expected. He looked around him, and choosing a flat rock, a little sheltered from the wind, he sat down and lit a cigar.

An hour passed, two hours—three hours. Lord Alceston was smoking his last cigar, his feet were numbed with cold, and his patience was almost exhausted. Suddenly he jumped to his feet with a quick exclamation. A light had suddenly appeared in the dark outline before him, and after twinkling unsteadily for a minute or two had settled down to burn with a clear, steady glow. He threw away his cigar and watched it with a peculiar smile. There could be no possible doubt about it. It came from the chamber in the tower, the key of which was at that very moment in his pocket.

. . . . . .

Mrs. Smith was sitting alone in her room, half parlor, half kitchen, with her eyes closed and her hands

idle in her lap. Before her on the oaken table was an open Bible, a lamp, and her knitting, but neither had received very much attention from her. She was an old woman, and for her it had been a terrible day. The suspense had wearied her, and now that it was over she was feeling the strain. But she was very grateful. She felt that she had reason to be, and she was genuinely grateful.

Hark! What was that? Surely not a clicking of the latch! It must have been the wind—a mouse. Hark! Was that not a footstep on the stone flags? Some one had entered the house—was closing the door. Oh, God, if it should be he, come back!

She clutched the side of her chair, and slowly opened her eyes. Before her, his hair tossed by the wind and the rain streaming from his clothes, stood Lord Alcester, with pale set face, and holding something in his right hand which flashed and gleamed in the dancing firelight. She looked at him, dumb, her eyes glazed with an unutterable horror and her aged limbs shaking. It was an awful moment. The perspiration stood in great beads on her dry, wrinkled forehead. Often afterward she wondered that the strings of her life had not snapped with the tension. It was enough to kill her.

His voice broke the spell which had numbed all her senses.

"Mrs. Smith," he said, sternly, "you have lied to me about that room. There is some one in there now. I am going to solve this mystery for myself."

Consciousness had come to her like a flash. She knew what it was he proposed to do; she foresaw the result. She saw the stern, set look in his face and the barrel of the revolver in his hand. It was the face of a man undaunted, indomitable, fearless. Yet she tried her best.

She threw herself on her knees before him. She grovelled at his feet.

"My lord," she cried. "Listen to me! Be warned! As sure as there is a God in Heaven I swear to you that you will repent it every day of your life if you do this thing!"

He looked at her curiously, but utterly unmoved.

"Though I face death itself I shall go to that room and discover its occupant," he said quietly. "You have done ill in keeping this thing secret from me, whatever it be, and if you have made my house the refuge of criminals you shall answer for it, old woman though you are. Get up. You do no good there."

She sprang toward him and wound her arms around his neck to hold him back. He disengaged himself as gently as he could, but still with some little force. With a shriek which rang through the bare rooms and empty ruined corridors and awoke a thousand strange echoes at every corner, she sank back upon the bare stone floor fainting.

He hesitated, but it was only for a second. She must take her chance. He could do little for her if he stayed, and if the sound of her cry had reached the tower he might find the occupant fled. Catching up the lamp in his left hand, he hurried away along the wide gallery.

Twice he lost his way and had to retrace his steps, and many times he stumbled over the startled rats and nearly fell. At last he reached the ruined corridors leading to the tower, and his heart gave a great leap. He strode along with the key ready in his hand. When he reached the part where there was a great gap in the side and roof the wind blew his lamp out. He threw it away over the side, and heard it go crashing down below. With his free hand he drew his revolver from his pocket and hurried on.

He reached the door and thrust the key in the lock. It was stiff and creaked in the turning. There was a sound from inside like a sharp report. Lord Clanavon, with a final wrench, threw the door open and stepped quickly inside.

A lamp was burning on the table which had been his father's, and a book lay open beside it. There was a strong smell of tobacco in the room, and there were other evidences of recent occupation. But the room had no occupant. It was empty.

Lord Alceston looked eagerly around for some clew as to the means by which the mysterious occupant had escaped him. Suddenly a certain part of the floor attracted his notice. The carpet was all disarranged and two of the oaken beams were aslant from a certain point, as though on a hinge. He stooped down to examine them closer and saw at once that they formed a trap-door. He lifted it, and below was an iron ladder leading into darkness as black as night.

He did not hesitate for more than a moment. Then slipping his revolver into his pocket and grasping the sides of the ladder with both hands, he commenced the descent. Five, six, seven, eight steps he counted. Then it began to get a little lighter, and from the ninth he stepped off on to some sort of flooring. There was no sound, no sign of any one else being near.

He struck a match and looked curiously about him. He was in a chamber similar in shape to, only smaller than, the one which he had just quitted, but windowless, and with no signs of ever having been regularly used as a human habitation. The walls were damp and spotted with fungi and huge cobwebs, the floor was rough and uneven, and a vault-like, musty smell filled the place. The only light came from a small opening in the wall on the seaward side, which seemed also to afford the sole means of ventilation.

A little heap in the far corner attracted Lord Clanavon's attention, and he made his way carefully toward it. Unfit though the place was, it had evidently been used by some one as a temporary lodging, for here in the driest portion were a heap of bedclothes, linen, and a few other articles bundled together, as though in great haste, with the view of hiding them. Directly he saw them Lord Clanavon knew that the object of his search could not be far away.

He struck another match, and looked around to see what means of exit the place afforded. Almost opposite him was a small wooden door, rotten with age and tottering on its hinges. Some efforts seemed to have been made to strengthen it, for sprung iron hooks were

roughly tied up with rope, but there was neither lock nor bolt to it.

Lord Clanavon looked at it for a minute, and then took a quick step forward and lit another match. There was no doubt about it. The door was shaking slightly backward and forward, as though held on the other side by an unsteady hand. Drawing a step nearer, and listening, he could hear a faint, low sound—the sound of an exhausted and panting man struggling to hold his breath.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH.

It did not take Lord Alceston long to make up his mind as to what course to adopt. Dropping the match which he had been holding upon the ground, he strode up to the door and leaned his shoulder against it.

"Whoever you are," he cried, "you had better come out and let me see you! If you don't I shall burst the door!"

There was no answer, save a half-stifled moan. Lord Alceston planted his feet firmly upon the ground and prepared for the struggle.

"I warn you to stand aside!" he called out. "I am going to have this door open!"

Again there was no answer. Lord Alceston wasted no more time in parleyings. Setting his teeth, he commenced the struggle.

He did not find the task of overcoming his unseen adversary quite so easy as he had expected. For nearly a minute he put forth his whole strength, but his feet slipped more than once on the damp slippery ground, and when on the eve of success he had lost his advantage and had been obliged to make a fresh start. The labored breath and groans of his adversary told him that he was in sore distress, but nevertheless he held on, and though the door creaked and trembled with the strain put upon it, it never budged an inch.

Breathless himself, Lord Alceston relinquished his efforts, and after a moment's consideration changed his tactics. Stepping back into the room, he took a few yards' run, and charged the door with irresistible force. The result was an unexpected one. The door went down before him with a crash, and he, not being prepared for such an easy victory, overbalanced himself and fell heavily upon it.

He picked himself up at once, unhurt, but a trifle dizzy. The reason of his fall was obvious. The opposing force which had been holding the door up had vanished. His adversary had fled.

He stood quite still for a moment, leaning forward into the darkness and listening intently. At first it seemed to him that the silence was as the silence of the grave; then as his senses grew a little more accustomed to his surroundings, he could faintly hear the sound of stealthy retreating footsteps.

His first impulse was to leap forward in the direction from which the sound came, and follow it in blind pursuit. Then he hesitated, for he was in black darkness, unrelieved by a single gleam of light. Feeling hastily in his pocket, he found his match-box—fortunately full—and, striking a light, held it high over his head.

He glanced around in hasty curiosity. The faint, flickering light was just sufficient to show him the bare, damp walls of a winding passage about six feet broad and scarcely so high—nothing else.

After a momentary glance he threw the match down, and stooping low to avoid knocking his head against the roof, he turned and hurried in the direction of the fleeting footsteps, now almost indistinguishable.

It was a chase which he remembered all his life—and with reason. More than once he missed his footing on the wet, slimy earth and fell forward on his hands. But the sound, now plainly to be heard, of the hurrying footsteps in front was enough to spur him on again, heedless of his aching limbs and cut hands. He ran into the jagged walls at sharp curves, bruising his face and arms, and at times he felt almost choked by the

noxious air. But he never dreamed of giving up the chase. So far from that, every fall seemed to make him more eager and to lend him renewed strength.

Beneath a somewhat careless and *insouciante* manner, acquired during his travels abroad, Lord Alceston was a thorough Englishman, and was possessed of a bull-dog tenacity of purpose. All this part of him was aroused now. Anger and surprise had become merged in another and a stronger feeling. There had been a conspiracy to deceive him! His property was being made the refuge of one who dared not live in the light of day—who was presumably a criminal; and, most heinous offence of all, his permission had not been asked! The shelter of his roof had been taken advantage of by stealth. Lord Alceston was very angry indeed. Danger and discomfort were alike forgotten. There was only one thought in his mind, and one purpose; and he meant to accomplish it.

Suddenly, the intense vault-like stillness of the place was broken by a strange, awful sound reaching him, faintly at first, but increasing in volume at every step forward he took. There is a sensation akin to fear, yet apart from cowardice—awe. Lord Alceston felt it as he paused and listened with bated breath. At first it sounded like the low rumbling of a threatened earthquake—like the thunderous splitting up of hills and mountains and the parting asunder of the solid earth. He stood quite still for a moment, listening intently. The ground beneath his feet was soft and wet; the walls were glistening with drops of wet which seemed to be oozing out from them. He put his foot on a soft, pulpish substance, and saw that it was a starfish clinging to a mass of dull brown, dank seaweed. Then the truth flashed in upon him, and he understood at once that low rumbling sound which seemed to make the walls of the passage shake and groan—this underground passage must lead to the sea.

He pushed on again without hesitation. Drowned in the monotonous roar which was singing now in his ears, he had no longer the sound of the footsteps in front to

encourage him. But a few more yards along the passage brought him within measurable distance of the end of his quest. The passage contracted into an opening scarcely wide enough for a man to creep through. Without a moment's pause he crawled through. Then he saw that he could go but a little further, for scarcely a dozen yards in front of him was another wider opening, like the mouth of a cave, and beyond there was the sea.

Lord Alceston stood upright, and looked eagerly around him. In the dusky semi-twilight it was hard to make out at all the shapeless objects which loomed about him. By degrees, however, as his eyes grew more accustomed to the light, they stood out clearer, and he began to take in his surroundings. He was in a cave, a low, sea-stained cave, terminating in the aperture by which he had entered. The sides were dripping with wet, and the ground, strewn with sea-weed and dark puddles, showed him that at high tide the sea entered. Several huge mounds of rock jutted up by his side in queer, fantastic shapes. Save for the dripping of the water into the puddles from the roof and sides of the cave, and the more distant ebb and flow of the sea, a deep, gloomy silence seemed to brood over the place. Nowhere was there any sign of any human being.

He had already taken one hasty step forward toward the entrance when a curious phenomenon presented itself. From behind one of the masses of rock, on his left-hand side, he became suddenly aware of a pair of bright, glistening eyes fastened upon him. At first he was almost inclined to think that they were starfish, but while he hesitated the dark, thin figure of a man stole out from behind the shelter of the rock and darted toward the aperture of the secret passage. Before he had taken half a dozen steps, however, Lord Alceston's right arm was wound around his neck, and he felt himself lifted bodily from his feet.

An unearthly cry rang out into the silence, and was echoed back from the roof and sides of the cave till it died away in a plaintive wail—a cry which seemed to come from a soul in agony, rather than from any mor-

tal being in physical fear. Lord Alceston shuddered, but he only tightened his grasp.

"Out into the light!" he cried, fiercely dragging his captive toward the entrance of the cave. "Let me see the face of the man who has led me this mad chase!"

The man sank down upon the ground as though exhausted.

"For the love of God and for your own everlasting peace of mind, Lord Bernard," he moaned, "leave me here! I swear by everything that is holy in heaven or earth that it will be better for you not to look upon my face. Let me go! Oh, let me go!"

"Not I!" cried Lord Alceston, peering through the twilight in a vain attempt to distinguish the features of his captive. "Get up, and come outside, or by heaven I'll carry you."

"Listen to me, Lord Clanavon!" cried the other in a weak, hollow tone. "There is no exit from this cave, and as the tide comes in that passage," pointing backward, "is impassable. Go back quickly, or you will be too late, and leave me here. Death will be welcome to me."

Lord Alceston made no answer, but reaching down he lifted up the crouching form like a baby, and stooping low down he carried him to the entrance of the cave and out into the fading daylight. Then he set him down.

"Get up, and don't lie there grovelling like a woman," he said sternly. "Get up, and tell me what you mean by this strange behavior, and who you are."

The man did not move. Lord Clanavon stooped down on one knee, and tore asunder the interlaced hands, which covered the wan, thin face. Then he let them go as though they had stung him, and staggered back.

"Neillson!" he cried. "My God!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ALONE WITH THE SEA-GULLS.

THERE was a dead silence between the two men after the recognition. Lord Alceston had stepped back a pace or two, and was leaning against a fragment of rock with a dazed look in his face. Neillson had risen slowly and with difficulty to his feet, and was standing quite still, breathing hard, and with his eyes fixed upon the wide expanse of sea. It was a strange meeting, not devoid of a certain dramatic interest. But the first sentence which passed bewteen them was a common-place one.

"You have been ill," Lord Alceston said slowly.

The man laughed—a strange, hollow, little laugh, which, low though it was, was caught up and echoed back from the cliffs with grim effect.

"Ay, I have been ill," he answered, looking down at himself curiously.

His clothes, once black, now stained and soiled with sea water and wet sand, hung about him in loose, empty folds. There were hollows underneath his cheek bones and deep black lines under his restless, unnaturally bright eyes. A continual tremor seemed to have laid hold of his shrunken form, and his breathing came with great difficulty. His appearance was very much the appearance of a man who has risen from his death-bed.

"Ay, I have been ill," he repeated, suddenly turning round and facing the other. "Why have you come here, Lord Alceston? Why could you not have let me die in peace?"

"I came, not in search of you," was the answer. "I came to go through some of my father's papers, and discovered that some one was living in secrecy in my own house. Had I not the right to know who it was? How came you here?"

"I came because it was a safe hiding-place."

"How was it that Mrs. Smith has sheltered you?"

"She is my mother. Mothers will do a great deal to

save their sons from the gallows, you know. Besides, she had instructions from the countess."

Lord Clanavon shuddered.

"Your mother?" he repeated.

"Ay; she is my mother."

"But her name is Smith."

"So is mine. The earl always called me Neillson because it had been the name of his first servant and he couldn't get out of using it. That was many years ago. The name has become my own."

"Neillson," said Lord Alceston, slowly, "if I had known that it was you who were occupying that secret chamber I might have gone away and left you in peace. I say—I might; whether I should have done so or no I cannot tell. But now that we have met face to face and alone," he glanced round with a slight shudder, as though for the first time aware of the dreariness of the surroundings, "you shall tell me—about that night."

"May God seal my lips forever if I do!" cried Neillson, passionately. "Oh, be wise, Lord Clanavon! I have been a faithful servant—faithful to death," he added in a lower tone, "for I stand even now upon the threshold of death. I can say no more. You may believe me a murderer if you will. You may take me up and throw me into the sea if you will. I will not resist. I could not if I would. But I will tell you nothing."

"What if I have you arrested as my father's murderer? There is a warrant out against you."

"Then if I lived so long I should probably be hanged," he answered. "I am no scholar, my lord, but I remember two lines of Shakespeare, which struck me once:

> 'You may as well go stand upon the shore,
> And bid the main Flood bate his usual height.'

Lord Clanavon, you may as well go stand upon that rock and cry out to the waves to come no further as bid me tell you anything about that night!"

There was a force in his shaking voice which spoke of a resolution which no words could shake. Lord Alceston turned round without another word. "Let us go

from this place," he said, with a shudder. "How came you to know of that passage?"

"From the earl. I never thought to be obliged to use it, though—to have to creep about the bowels of the earth like a hunted rat."

They stooped down and entered the cave. Then both started, and a look of horror flashed into Neillson's white face.

"Listen!" he cried. "Listen!" His voice was well-nigh drowned in the wild roar of rushing water and its heavy splashing against the rock-hewn sides of the passage. While they stood there a torrent of green sea streaked with white came foaming out of the entrance to the secret way, and reached to their feet.

"My lord—Lord Bernard!" cried Neillson, wringing his hands. "I am a murderer now indeed. Fool, idiot, that I was to keep you here."

"What has happened—what does this mean?" he cried.

"The sea is round us. It floods the secret passage at every tide, and it has done so now. We cannot get back."

"And here—does the tide reach here?" cried Lord Alceston.

Neillson pointed to the dripping roof.

"The cave is submerged," he answered, bitterly.

Lord Alceston rushed outside. Already the long waves were rolling to within a few yards of the cave's mouth, and the salt spray was dashed in showers into his face as he stood there. He looked wildly around. The cliffs on either side stood far out into the sea, and nowhere on their smooth perpendicular sides, shining with wet, was there the least chance of ascending even a few feet. While he stood there gazing hopelessly around, a great wave came bounding out from the mouth of the cave behind and flowed around him almost to his knees. Dripping with wet and breathless, Neillson staggered out to his side, sobbing and crying.

"Oh, Lord Bernard! Lord Bernard," he cried, "I have brought you here to die. God forgive me!"

Lord Alceston was pale, and there was a sad, wistful

look in his blue eyes. But there was no fear in his face. He was something of a philosopher, something of a Christian, and altogether a high-spirited young Englishman, with all the *noblesse* of his order, and a profound contempt of fear in any shape. Death stared him in the face, but he was equal to it. Had there been hope, had it been a more doubtful matter—he might have been agitated. As it was, he was quite calm.

"It is nothing to do with you, Neillson," he said quietly. "It is a hard thing, but I'm not afraid to die. Say your prayers, man, if you know any."

A dull, lethargic composure seemed to creep over the two men. They stood knee-deep in the cruel green sea, which came curling about them, ever creeping upward, and they gazed with dull eyes over the blank sea. After a while Lord Clanavon roused himself as though with an effort.

"When the sea comes to my neck, Neillson," he said, quietly, "I am going to swim. The village is round the western promontory, I suppose?"

"Yes," answered Neillson, in a choking voice, "but you cannot pass the breakers."

Lord Clanavon looked at the long line of foam streaked, seething waves, and sighed.

"I suppose not," he said. "But it is hard to die without making an effort. I shall try. Listen to me, Neillson. In a few hours we shall both be in another world. I do not blame you, mind, but you know that it is through you that we are in this position."

"I know it," Neillson groaned.

Lord Clanavon put his hand on his shoulder kindly.

"I am not blaming you, Neillson. You fled here thoughtlessly, I know. I only mention this because I am going to ask you a favor."

"You want me to tell you——"

"Ay, I should die easier if I knew."

"Come outside, Lord Bernard. It will take me some few minutes to tell you all, and if we climb that rock it will give us a little longer."

Lord Alceston, stronger by far than his companion,

and a trained athlete, clambered easily to the summit of the slippery boulder. Then, stooping down, he dragged Neillson up to his side, and waited patiently while he recovered his breath.

There they stood in the dreary twilight, with the tall cliffs frowning around them, and the sea-gulls shrieking above their heads, while below the cruel, hungry sea was sweeping in, creeping higher and higher at every moment. Lord Alceston, finding his companion was shaking and trembling with the cold and agitation, passed his strong arm around him and held him up. Then he held his breath and stooped his head to hear from those white, trembling lips the story of his father's murder.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A DRAMA OF DEATH.

"LET me give you one more chance, Lord Bernard," said Neillson, speaking rapidly, but in a low, tremulous tone. "Let me swear to you here, on the threshold of death, by every hope I have of another world, that it will be better for you if you let me carry my secret with me untold into the grave which awaits us. You will die a happier man—and so shall I."

"You have passed your word, Neillson, and I claim it," was the firm, unhesitating answer. "Speak. I am waiting, and the time is short."

He commenced at once. His voice was weak and broken with agitation, but in Lord Alceston's ears it drowned the wild, onward rush and backward motion of the angry waves and rang out above the screech of the dragged pebbles and the weird cries of the wheeling sea-gulls. He heard nothing but that faltering voice, pouring out an ill-told, disconnected story of which he fast gathered up the threads. It seemed in those few minutes, which he looked upon as his last on earth, almost as though his intelligence and perceptions were quickened and intensified—as though everything

which he was told, every fact and incident, stood out in bolder colors, and his mind was gifted with added powers of reception and comprehension. And this is the story to which he listened:

"I was engaged by Mr. Brudnell to be your father's confidential servant just before he started for a brief Continental tour. He was then only twenty-one years old, but he was an orphan, as your lordship knows, and his own master.

"We travelled about for some time in a leisurely manner, staying longest in Paris and at a little village up among the Swiss mountains. Except for Paris, your father seemed to care very little for cities, and we spent most of our time in out-of-the-way places. Chance led us to a small watering-place on the French coast, within a short distance of Nice. My master liked the place, and we took up our quarters for some time at the hotel.

"It was here, at the casino, that your father met the Count d'Augeville. The count was of good family, and had very pleasant manners. A slight acquaintance, begun in the most casual way, grew into intimacy. Alas! Alas! Alas!

"Soon your father began to visit at the count's villa. It was a nice place, right away from the town, and finely situated close to the cliffs. The count was a widower, with two daughters. To sum him up at once, he was also a scoundrel and a gambler.

"The daughters were twins, both beautiful and wonderfully alike. From the moment of his introduction to them a change seemed to come over my master. During all the time I had been with him I had scarcely seen him speak to a woman, except when he had been obliged. Now he seemed completely bewitched. He was always there, either riding or walking on the cliffs or driving into the town with one of them.

"Cecile and Marie were their names. They were both in love with him, I am sure. Which he preferred I could not tell at that time. When he sent bouquets and presents he generally sent to both of them, and he was

with one as often as the other. Of course there was a good deal of gossip about them in the town, but Miss Cecile's name was generally mentioned. Miss Marie had another admirer, to whom she was generally supposed to be engaged, and whom she afterward married.

"While this was going on in the daytime my master was losing large sums of money—being cheated out of them, in fact, every night by Count d'Augeville. Once I remember he had to go to England to raise the money for a debt owing to him. Then I ventured to remonstrate with him, and very nearly got dismissed.

"It was one night when we were at the Villa d'Augeville. The count and my master had been playing cards all the evening, and were sitting at a little round table close to the window, which was open. They had finished, when my master saw me strolling about the garden and called me in.

"'Neillson,' he said, 'I wish you to listen to what I am going to say to the Count d'Augeville.'

"The count looked up, startled. My master went on quite calmly.

"'You hold me your debtor for to-night's play to the amount of twelve thousand francs, I believe?'

"'That is the amount,' the count said.

"'And you have won during the last month about one hundred and twenty thousand francs from me?'

"The count frowned. 'I don't remember the amount,' he said, haughtily. 'Gentlemen don't talk about such things afterward.'

"'The hundred and twenty thousand francs I have paid,' my master continued. 'This twelve thousand I shall not pay.'

"'And why the devil not?' cried the count, springing up.

"'Because the odds are scarcely fair. In return for the lesson which you have just given me, Count d'Augeville, permit me to give you one. Gentlemen do not play poker with marked cards.'

"As he spoke he snatched at the pack which was lying between them on the table and passed them to me.

"'Examine those cards, Neillson,' he said, coolly. 'You observe where each one is marked at the right-hand corner?'

"I saw it at once, and told him so. Then he passed them on to the two other gentlemen, who had advanced from the other end of the room. They both looked at them and shrugged their shoulders. The fact that they were marked cards was undeniable.

"The count had been sitting quite still, pale and dazed. Even now he did not speak a word, and my master went on:

"'Under these circumstances, Count d'Augeville, I shall not remain any longer under your roof. I have to inform you that your daughter Cecile was married to me last week at the Protestant church at Nice. I am sorry that I have not a copy of the certificate with me, but you will find the entry in the book if you care to go and look for it. I intend my wife to leave this house with me to-night.'

"Suddenly we heard the sound of trailing draperies behind, and Mlle. Marie swept up to the little group, her face white with passion, and her great eyes gleaming like fire in the moonlight.'

"'It is false, *mon père!*' she cried, falling on her knees before him. 'He is base, perfidious, a traitor. Cecile is not married to him. If she leaves this house with him to-night she will go to her ruin. You will not let her go, father, wicked man that he is. He put those cards on the table himself. I saw him do it.'

"His daughter's words seemed to give the count fresh courage. He sprang to his feet, shaking with anger.

"'You are a liar, Alceston!' he cried, passionately. 'You shall give me satisfaction for this, and at once.'

"My master stood up quietly.

"'I shall not fight you,' he said, 'because, in the first place, you are my wife's father; and in the next, you are a common thief, unworthy to cross swords with an English nobleman.'

"How he did it I don't know, but somehow Count d'Augeville hurled a wine-glass which hit my master

on the forehead. I saw the blood streaming down his forehead, but he scarcely seemed to notice it.

"'You rascal!' screamed the count. 'I am noble, too, and you shall fight me!'

"My master hesitated for a moment; then he touched his forehead lightly.

"'After this,' he said, 'I rescind my words. I am at your service when and where you please.'

"'Now; this moment!' cried the count. 'The moon is full, and it is as light as day. M. d'Armande will be your second. Victor, you will stand by me in this?' he said to the other man, whose name I have forgotten.

"My master lifted the curtain and looked outside. It was, as the count had said, as light as day.

"'As you will,' he said, carelessly. 'M. d'Armande, will you honor me?'

"M. Victor and Count d'Augeville whispered together for a moment or two; then the latter came up to my master and M. d'Armande.

"'Monsieur the Count,' he said, 'has no duelling pistols at hand, but several rapiers. Has Lord Alceston any objection to fight with these weapons?'

"'Not the slightest,' my master answered. I saw a savage gleam of joy flash into Count d'Augeville's face. No doubt he thought that because my master was an Englishman he could not fence. But I knew better, and I was glad of the choice. I knew that my master was the most brilliant swordsman I had ever seen. One never knows what may happen with pistols; but with swords I felt quite sure that my master must win.

"They opened the windows and trooped down the broad, white steps on to the lawn. My master was the last to go, and as he was quitting the room Mlle. Marie laid hold of his arm and whispered something imploringly in his ear. He shook her off and turned away without a word. I shall never forget her face. If a look could have slain him he would have been a dead man.

"It was a strange scene on that little plot of grass—I

don't think I ever saw a stranger one. The whole garden was heavy with the scent of flowers and creepers, mingled with the aromatic perfume from the plantation of pine trees which bordered the grounds and sloped downward to the sea. Everything was as light and clear as day, only there was the deep midnight stillness and the starlit sky. The figures on the lawn, with their drawn swords flashing coldly in the moonlight, seemed like a party of devils breaking into Paradise. The count's face was drawn and distorted with rage, and the other two seemed agitated too. Only my master stood there quite calm, with his shirt-sleeves rolled up, leaning upon his sword, and with an odd smile upon his lips. I went to him and asked if he had anything to say to me. He only laughed.

"'If we fence till daylight,' he said, 'the count will never touch me. I never felt in better form.'

"I have seen one or two duels, but I never saw another one like that. The count went at my master like a fury, but he never seemed to get anywhere near him. My lord stood his ground quite carelessly, smiling all the time, as though he were a fencing-master, indulging a pupil with a little loose play and parrying every thrust with ridiculous ease. The count tried him every way—in carte, in tierce, in cercle, in octave, in seconde, but it was all the same. My lord was always his superior, and if he had chosen he could have run the count through time after time with the simplest repass; but he never once attempted it.

"They had been engaged nearly half an hour before the end came, and very unexpected it was to all of us. The count was fencing very loosely, and my lord, to vary it a little, drew back, and with a powerful flangonet sent the count's sword a dozen yards into the air. The count somehow lost his balance and fell forward. My lord being used to the most correct fencing, had brought his sword into line again immediately; he had concluded the flangonet, and the count fell right upon it before he could draw back.

"We heard the sword enter his body, and almost at

once it came out at his back dripping with blood. My lord drew it back and leaned over the count, who fell heavily backward without a single cry.

"'He has only himself to blame for this,' my lord said, wiping his sword on the grass, and for the first time turning pale. 'I would have spared him if I could.'

"I never saw any one die so quickly. He just drew himself up once, clutched at the air with his fingers, and then fell back dead. But the most awful part was to come. While they were all gathered around him a tall, white figure glided down from the steps and across the grass. toward them. Lord Bernard, death is close upon us, but even now the memory of that girl's face makes me shudder more than the thought of those hungry waves below. It was awful. She threw herself down on the grass by his side and wound her arms around him. But she knew directly that he was dead.

"They all fell back and stood silent. My lord for the first time appeared to be agitated, and, dropping his sword, covered his face with his hands. Suddenly she turned round upon him, the moonlight flooding down upon her beautiful golden hair and ivory-marble face.

"'You!' she cried. 'You! My God, was it you?'

"He moved out of the shade of the cypress tree under which he had been standing and stretched out his arms imploringly to her. But she waved him away.

"'Out of my sight!' she cried wildly. 'Away, away! Never come near me again. Never! Murderous coward, to kill an old man!'

"'Cecile,' he cried, 'it was his own fault! Ask them if it was not. You are my wife, remember.'

"She laughed; an awful laugh it was.

"'May God's curse rest forever upon me,' she cried, 'if I smile into your face again, much more let you touch my fingers. Dare to come near me and I will kill you. Away! Out of my sight, monster! Wretch! If men will not punish you in this world may God do so in the next!' Then she fell on her knees again by her father's side, and my lord went away."

CHAPTER XXX.

AMONG THE WAVES.

NEILLSON'S voice had been gradually growing fainter. Now it ceased altogether, and Lord Alceston began to fear that he would faint.

"Neillson," he said quickly, "I must hear the rest. I know nothing yet about that night."

"Give me a minute—only a minute," he begged.

Lord Alceston nodded, and waited in silence. Darkness was gradually blotting out the awful view, sinking upon the wild, angry sea, and half obscuring the giant cliffs. The water was all around them, and then a more than ordinary turbulent wave broke over the rock, drenching them with spray. The end could not be far off.

"I must tell you the rest as quickly as I can," Neillson whispered hoarsely, glancing around with a shudder. "They advised my lord to fly, but he preferred to stand his trial and was acquitted. A fair account of the fight was given, and general opinion was all in his favor. But Cecile d'Augeville, who was really his wife, shut herself up in a nunnery, and refused to see him. My lord returned to England, took up his commission in the army, and went to the war. On his return he had news, I do not know from where, of his wife's death. Then he married Margaret Montarid, your mother.

"I can take one step from here to the night—of his murder. There was a great reception at Alceston House. The butler sent for me. A note had been left at the door marked immediate. Was it worth while sending it up to his lordship? I took it and glanced at it curiously enough. My God, what a shock it gave me! The handwriting was the handwriting of the dead, or of Cecile d'Augeville. When I had recovered a little I took it upstairs, and after a word or two of preparation I gave it to my lord. He bore it well, but it was an awful shock. He went almost at once to his study, and sent for me.

"When I answered his bell he was leaning forward in his chair with his head buried in his hands. He looked up and the change in his face was awful; but I have no time to talk about that. Shall I go on, Lord Bernard?"

"Ay, go on!" he cried desperately. "You are making death easier. My poor mother! God help her!"

A great wave came dashing over them, and Neillson would have been swept away but that Lord Alceston passed his right arm around him and held him fast.

"The note I saw," he panted out breathless from the shock of the water. "It is in my breast-pocket now. It will perish with me. It is signed Cecile d'Augeville Alceston. It said that this was her revenge for her father's murder, for so she termed his death. She had sent him a forged certificate of death, had let him marry again, had waited until his son—you—had grown up, and now her time had come. She had come to claim him as her lawful husband—to bring disgrace and social ruin upon him. Lord Bernard, he left his house that night and he went to her lodgings. You remember the case of foreign daggers in his cabinet. On the morrow she was found murdered, with one of these in her heart."

"Neillson, is this true? My God!" moaned Bernard Alceston.

"I feared that something might have happened," Neillson continued. "By daybreak I was on my way to her lodgings. The murder had just been discovered. I saw the body, and I knew the dagger in a moment. For a while I was bewildered how to act, but I did my best. I hurried back to Grosvenor Square. The house was all silent. I went to the library. Oh, it was awful, awful!" he cried wildly.

"Go on, Neillson, go on!"

"I rearranged the daggers. I left everything else in the room as it was—for others to discover. Then I went softly to her ladyship's room. I told her. She was brave, but oh! thank God that I am going to die, that the memory of her agony can haunt me no longer!

There was but one course for me to follow, and I did it. I alone knew that my master had left his house on that night when the reception was going on. The whole miserable story was plain to me, but to no one else. It must have been perjury or flight, and we chose the latter, because my flight would divert suspicion. You see now, Lord Bernard, why I was hiding here—why I feared to meet you!"

Lord Alceston grasped his hand firmly.

"You have been a faithful servant, Neillson," he said, in an unsteady tone. "Your reward will come! May God grant it you! Good-by!"

"Good-by, Lord Bernard! Remember——"

A huge green mass of water loomed for a moment in the darkness and then broke over their heads. Lord Alceston would have clung to his companion to the end, but Neillson's last act was a self-denying one. He cast himself loose from the strong arms which encircled him and flung himself down into the water, and his young master, having both hands free, fell down on his face, and clung to the slippery rock. The water dashed over him and receded. Another wave was close at hand, but the moment's respite was valuable. He stood up and tossed off his boots and as much of the remainder of his clothing as he could. Then, without waiting for the breaking wave, he plunged into the abyss of waters.

. . . . . .

There was a singing in his ears, a dull buzzing in his head, and a dull, dreamy sensation stealing over him, numbing his aching limbs and stopping all pain. He had battled with the waters in vain, and at last, half fainting with exhaustion, he had thrown up his arms and given in. The sea was his master. He had fought hard for life, and he could fight no longer. And this was death—this gradual dwindling away of all sensations; this hazy dreaminess which was stealing fast over him. It was not so very terrible, after all—not half so terrible as the struggle. He felt himself dashed against some rock, but there was no pain. Probably some bone was broken, but he did not feel it. He was too near

death. Did every one die as easily as this? he wondered. No part of him seemed awake save his brain; and even that was dulled. Memory was busy. Scenes of his earliest boyhood came flashing before him one after another, but he found himself contemplating them with all the languid interest of an outsider. Was he in the world? Had he ever belonged to it? Gradually all consciousness of his own identity was fading away from him. He was quite contented—in a vague, impersonal sort of way. He had an idea that he was going to rest, and he was very tired. The sooner the better. . . . Ah, a shock more violent than the others. It was coming now, then. Darkness—black darkness—a moment's sinking, and memory and sensation faded away without a struggle!

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

MARIE DE FEURGET'S CONFIDENCES; THE VILLA BY THE MEDITERRANEAN.

I AM dull, hatefully, miserably, wretchedly dull. There's a confession to start with! Away from the convent, really in the outside world of which we girls used to talk so much, and—dull! Once I should have laughed at the very idea, and laughed more than ever at the idea of being driven to write down all my thoughts in this silly school-girl fashion. I wish I were back at the convent! I wish I were anywhere but here. And yet I dare not tell *mon père* so, for it would make him very unhappy—very angry, too, I expect. He would call me ingrate, undutiful, *mechant.* Ah! I know exactly what he would say. I suppose he is fond of me, too. He must be. He buys me pretty things and he is always bidding me amuse myself. But how can I, when I am always alone? He is so fond of solitude himself that I suppose he thinks it is best for every one else, too; but it is so dull. He takes me out—never. I have not a single girl friend—not one; and not even an acquaintance of the other sex. Annette tells me that they call him the misanthrope in the village. It is very disagreeable to have a father who is a misanthrope.

I wonder whether he has really any great trouble. Sometimes I think that it must be so, and then I feel very sorry for him. I thought so when we came back from that awful visit to England! What a terrible time that was! Those poky little lodgings, that awful fu-

neral we went to, and his strange manner all the time! It makes me shudder to think of it all. And why should we have changed our name while we were there, too? Ah! it was all very odd; but there was one thing about it which I shall never forget.

Ah, well; you have one advantage, you great untidy note-book—though you're a queer sort of companion you won't tell tales, and I can confess to you what I wouldn't even whisper to any one in the world, not even to Annette; for though she is a very good girl she is a dreadful gossip. I would like, oh, so much, to see him just once more. I wonder if he has even thought of me at all? I don't suppose so. He is a great noble, *mon père* says, and we are—well, nobody very much. I wish that we were different, that everything was different.

How I wish that we were of his order, and could go somewhere—to a great dance, or a reception, and meet him unexpectedly, and he would be so surprised, and—but this is awfully silly. I mustn't write any more nonsense like this, or I shall begin to be ashamed of myself and close you up forever, my silent confidant. Of course he has forgotten all about me by this time. Of course he has. And yet I wonder whether he has quite? He must see so many girls ever so much nicer than I am, and they must all like him. Ah me, how dull I am; and what a dreary world this is! I wish that I could think of something fresh to do, or that something would happen; I wouldn't mind much what. Of course it won't, though. I think I'll go to bed, and get up and see the sun rise. Good-night, you stupid old book!

. . . . . .

Last night I was praying for a change of any sort. Well, it has come; and, slight though it is, I am glad of it. Sometimes *mon père* seems to weary of his dull, learned books and his long, lonely walks and visits to his sick pensioners, and then he goes off down into the little town, and into the casino reading-room, never stopping there very long and seldom noticing or speak-

ing to any of the strangers there. This week he has been twice—a very rare occurrence; and this afternoon, on his return, he called me to him and told me briefly that he had invited guests to dinner and that he should expect me to receive them. There were no ladies, he said, only gentlemen; but of course I knew this, for he could scarcely have asked ladies to dine here, even had he known any, without their having called on me first. He was going away to his study without telling me any more, but I coaxed him into having tea with me on the balcony, and then he told me all about it.

"You are a very curious young person, Marie," he said, "but I suppose you won't rest till I've told you all about it. When I was at the casino on Monday there was a very nice English boy there with his tutor. I don't know why, but I took rather a fancy to him, and as we were at the same table we talked together for some time. Of course he told me all about himself—an Englishman always does that. It seems that his name is Carlyon, and he is supposed to be reading for an examination with a tutor, who is travelling with him. The tutor is a stupid, careless sort of fellow, who has never been out of England before, and is about the last person in the world to have the charge of a high-spirited lad like Carlyon, who seems just one of those boys who are born to get into mischief. I remember thinking something of the sort when I left them on Monday, and to-day I find that I was right. There is a fellow named D'Aubron always hanging about the casino—a very pleasant, gentlemanly fellow on the surface, but in reality an adventurer, a card-sharper—in short, a blackguard. It seems that he has managed to ingratiate himself somehow with both Carlyon and his tutor, and unless some one manages to put a stop to it the result is very obvious. I heard D'Aubron ask young Carlyon to dine with him this evening, and while he was hesitating I asked them all to dine with me instead. It was the only thing I could think of at the moment. Carlyon accepted at once, and so, I am sorry to say, did D'Aubron. That is the history of our dinner-party."

"But how about the dinner?" I asked, for though our cook was a good one, I doubted whether she would be prepared at so short a notice.

"I have seen to that," he said, rising. "I am going into the library now. Do not forget that dinner is at eight o'clock."

I was a little late, because Annette would insist upon so many finishing touches, and when I reached the drawing-room I found that they had arrived and were waiting for me to go into dinner. I was rather shy when I opened the door, but *mon père* came to me at once and gave me his arm. Then he took me up and introduced me to our guests. I was introduced to each separately, first to Mr. Carlyon. He bowed awkwardly and blushed like a school-girl, but I liked him better than any of the rest. He was quite tall, and had such a bright, open face with blue eyes and brown curly hair. He was just what I had expected, only nicer. Then there was M. d'Aubron. He was a tall, sallow young man, with black mustache and eyes, and rather prominent teeth. I didn't like him at all. He looked at me coldly, and yet familiarly, and bowed so low that I thought he must be going to kiss my fingers or do something absurd. And he made such a ridiculous little speech, too, about the unexpected pleasure, and all that sort of nonsense. I took care to pretend not to hear it, and I turned my back upon him as soon as I could. Mr. Brown, Mr. Carlyon's tutor, was the last of the three to whom I was introduced. He was rather a young-looking man with red hair and whiskers, large spectacles and a very feeble expression. He didn't look at all the man likely to have any authority over any one—least of all over a high-spirited boy like Arthur Carlyon.

Very soon after my arrival a strange man-servant—we only kept three maids at the villa, so he must have been engaged specially—announced that dinner was served. *Mon père* asked Mr. Carlyon to take me in, and the poor boy did blush so when he gave me his arm. I was glad it was he, though, for I felt that I should like him. When we reached the dining-room—a room

which we scarcely ever used—I had quite a surprise. There was some new furniture, and the table was beautifully decorated with silver and glass and choice flowers. The conservatory, which had been empty ever since we had been at the villa, was filled with palms and exotics. Then there were two men-servants to wait at table, and from the many dainty courses I knew that there must be a strange cook downstairs. I tried to look quite dignified, as though I were quite used to it all, but I'm afraid I wasn't very successful.

There was plenty of conversation during dinner-time. Mr. Carlyon soon found his tongue, and amused me very much. My father and Mr. Brown started a literary conversation. M. d'Aubron alone remained almost silent, and paid attention to his dinner. Several times my father reluctantly broke off his conversation with Mr. Brown and spoke courteously to him, but the result was always the same. M. d'Aubron was evidently sulking. At last, *mon père* left him alone, and I was glad of it. How I did dislike that man! I positively hated him. I knew that he was a bad man.

Now and then I found myself watching my father, partly in wonder, partly in admiration. It was hard to believe that this was the same man whose morose moods and gloomy, troubled looks had been such a dead weight upon my happiness. He was an admirable host. It did me good to look at him.

As soon as it seemed to me that the proper time had come I rose and left them to their wine. Mr. Carlyon, being nearest, opened the door for me, and in his hurry managed to tread upon my skirts and tear them badly. Then I went into the drawing-room, and Annette came and did the best she could with some pins, for I did not feel like changing my dress.

CHAPTER II.

A MONOTONY BROKEN.

I DON'T think I ever felt more restless than I did that evening. I couldn't work, I couldn't read, I couldn't even play. At last I opened the French window and went out on the balcony.

It was a lovely night, such a night as only we dwellers in southern lands are permitted to enjoy. Through the dark boughs of the silent trees I could catch faint flashes of the sea, glistening like a silver lake in the light of the yellow moon, and away in front of me the black hills stretched their dim, cloud-betopped heads toward the sky.

The sound of some one entering the drawing-room behind disturbed me, and I looked in through the half-open window. Mr. Carlyon was there, standing just inside the doorway with his hands in his trousers pockets, and glancing around with a very disconsolate expression. Evidently he had come to look for me, and was disappointed—very disappointed he appeared—to find the room empty. He was in the act of quitting the room when I entered it, and I had to call him back. He turned round and came toward me at once, with a pleased smile on his handsome, boyish face.

"Hope I'm not disturbing you, Mlle. de Feurget," he said, apologetically. "You see, your father and old Brown—my tutor, you know—are deep in a discussion on Rousseau, and D'Aubron is as sulky as a bear about something or other, and, you see——"

I stopped him, laughing.

"You needn't make so many excuses for coming in to talk to me," I said. "It isn't complimentary. I'm very glad to have you, I'm sure. You're not interested in Rousseau, then?"

"Not I," he answered, coming and standing by my side at the window. "Seems to me that he was such a sentimental sort of a chap. Jolly night, isn't it?"

"Very," I answered. "I was out on the balcony enjoying it when you came in. How long have you been in St. Marien, Mr. Carlyon?" I continued.

"About ten days; that is all. I don't know that we should have stopped so long only Brown's rather sweet on the place."

"And do you like it?"

"Well, as much as most of these poky little Continental towns," he admitted, grudgingly. "I don't like any place so well as England, though. It's a great deal too hot here for me. Don't you find it so?"

"No, I don't think so," I answered. "But then, of course, I never attempt to go out in the middle of the day, and perhaps I am more used to it, too. You see, I have lived in France all my life."

"How well you speak English!" he said, admiringly. "Your people are all French, then, I suppose?"

My people! What grim irony it sounded! If only he could have known what a heartache his simple words gave me! I leaned back in my chair, and for a few moments I forgot his very existence. Was there not a cruel loneliness in the very thought that my memory was powerless to recall even my mother's face? Through all those long, weary years of childhood or girlhood, and now of womanhood, there had been no one to care for me, no one nearer than stern old Mme. Duponte, my head governess at the convent. And even now were things much better? I had a father, 'tis true, but a father who had only a cold, distracted sort of affection to offer me, whose strange manner of life was a constant mystery, and who met every question of mine as to our relatives, our past and my mother with stern silence or agitated admonitions. Perhaps the tears glistened in my eyes for a moment at Mr. Carlyon's innocent question. At any rate, something in my manner must have told him that his words had touched a painful chord, and he looked up at me appealingly.

"I'm so sorry," he said, humbly. "I always was a clumsy sort of fellow. You're not angry with me?"

"Of course not," I answered, lightly. "You have said

nothing clumsy, either. And now we'll have some tea, shall we? Do you mind ringing the bell?"

He sprang up with unnecessary haste and rang it with quite unnecessary vigor. I ordered some tea from the alarmed servant, who came hurrying in. After that conversation languished for a few minutes, and as Mr. Carlyon still appeared distressed, I was obliged to try and explain to him a little.

"It was very silly of me just now," I said, "but I feel very lonely sometimes, and your words seemed to remind me of it. I have no one but my father, you know."

"But you have some friends, of course?"

I shook my head a little sadly.

"None?"

He looked quite distressed, and bewildered, too.

"But, Mlle. de Feurget!" he exclaimed, "it must be perfectly dreadful for you! Do you mean to say that you don't visit anywhere, and that no one comes to see you? Doesn't your father know any of the people here?"

"I suppose he knows them," I answered, sighing. "In fact, I know that he does; but he is quite a recluse. He will not go into any society at all!"

"That must be very bad for you," he said, feelingly. "It was awfully good of him to ask us here, if that is the case. I——"

There was a knock at the door and the sound of some one entering. Mr. Carlyon and I both looked round, and he forgot to finish his sentence.

CHAPTER III.

M. D'AUBRON IS DISAPPOINTED.

It was M. d'Aubron who had entered. He was attired for leaving, and carried his hat in his hand. Somehow I don't think that he was too well pleased to find Mr. Carlyon with me.

"Are you leaving already, M. d'Aubron?" I asked.

"Unfortunately, yes," he answered, bowing. "I have some friends coming to my rooms this evening, and I

must be there to entertain them. I'm sorry to hurry you, Carlyon, but——"

"Oh, I'm not coming yet," he interrupted, "not, at least, if Mlle. de Feurget will allow me to stay a little longer," he added, turning to me. I assured him at once that I should be very pleased to have him.

M. d'Aubron bit his lip and looked annoyed.

"Against mademoiselle I can of course say nothing," he remarked. "But you must allow me to remind you, Carlyon, that your engagement to me for this evening was a prior one."

"I haven't forgotten it. I'll look in on our way home," Mr. Carlyon promised.

M. d'Aubron's face cleared a little.

"Very good. I shall expect to have the pleasure then. Mlle. de Feurget, permit me to wish you good-evening. I am consoled for the loss of Mr. Carlyon's society by the reflection that I leave him in your hands."

I wished him good-evening, coldly, and he went.

"It's very nice of you to let me stop," Mr. Carlyon remarked, sipping the tea I had handed to him.

"I think it's very nice of you to want to stop," I answered; "besides, I'd a great deal rather you were here than with M. d'Aubron."

"Would you, really?" he exclaimed. "Why?"

"Because I don't like him."

"Oh, he isn't a bad sort," Mr. Carlyon said, meditatively. "I'm not sure that I care much for him myself, though," he added.

"I should think that he was a very bad companion for you," I remarked. "He plays cards, doesn't he?"

"Every one does here," Mr. Carlyon answered. "It's about the only thing to do."

"Do you play much?" I asked.

"Not I," he declared. "I've played a few times with D'Aubron and some of his friends, but it's a little too expensive for me."

"I should think so. M. d'Aubron generally wins, doesn't he?" I asked dryly.

Mr. Carlyon looked surprised.

"Yes. How do you know that?"

"Oh, I don't know," I said, shrugging my shoulders. "He seems to me to be the sort of man who would win at cards. To tell you the truth, Mr. Carlyon," I continued, hesitatingly, "I have heard my father speak not altogether favorably of M. d'Aubron. I hope that you are not very friendly with him?"

His face clouded over a little, and he looked thoughtful.

"No, I'm not very friendly with him," he said; "I only met him at the casino, you know. Still, I think he's a gentleman. He's been rather kind to me."

There was a knock at the door, and a servant entered the room bearing a note.

"A gentleman for monsieur," he said, delivering it to Mr. Carlyon.

"For me!" Mr. Carlyon repeated, evidently a good deal surprised. "Who on earth can want to see me at this time of night? And we never left word where we were going, either. Sure there's no mistake?"

"I think not, sir," the man replied. "The note is addressed to the Honorable Arthur Carlyon, and the gentleman who gave it me desired that it should be handed into monsieur's own hands. He waits below."

Mr. Carlyon tore it open and glanced through the few words which it contained. At first he uttered a quick exclamation of surprise; then a deep red flush stole into his face and he crushed the note up indignantly.

"All right! You can tell the gentleman I'll be down in a moment," he said to the servant. "I'm so sorry to go," he added, turning to me, "but I'm afraid I must. A cousin of mine has turned up unexpectedly and wants to see me. I thought at first that it was only a reminder from D'Aubron, but it isn't."

"You must go, of course, then," I said, holding out my hand. "Good-evening."

"Good-by, Mlle. de Feurget, and thank you so much for the pleasantest evening I've had since I left England. I wonder if you would allow—but perhaps you don't care to receive callers?" he asked anxiously.

I hesitated. It was so ungracious to refuse him, and my life was very dull. Why should he not come sometimes? It would be better for him, at any rate, than being with M. d'Aubron. There was no society to be scandalized, for, alas, I had none. Why should I not follow my own will for once? My father would not object, I felt sure. "I think that you might call—once, at any rate," I said, smiling.

He clasped my hand in his long brown fingers, and I bore it without flinching, although it hurt horribly.

"Thank you, Mlle. de Feurget. Thank you and good-by."

He took himself off at last, and my eyes followed him with something like regret. I was very glad that he had come, very glad that I knew him. It seemed to me somehow that I was less friendless than I had been an hour ago, and I felt better in another way too. The absolute solitude of my life and the entire lack of companionship had not been without its effect upon me. I had felt myself daily growing more and more callous before the cold abstraction of my unhappy father. It was the slow adaptation of my nature to his, and it had begun to make itself felt. I had been hungering for a word of sympathy from some one, and the eager, respectful homage of that bright-faced English boy did me a world of good. I felt after he had gone that I could cry, and a woman who can shed tears is never in her orst state.

CHAPTER IV.

AN INTRODUCTION.

After Mr. Carlyon had left me I gathered up my work and prepared to go to my room. Perhaps if I had done so things might have turned out very differently. Who can tell? But fate in the shape of a soft, sweet breath of night wind, which stole in through the still open window, drew me out on to the balcony instead; and when I saw the golden moon which had risen from

behind the tops of the fir trees, and felt the soft, luxurious caress of the odorous night breeze upon my hot temples, I lingered. And leaning back against the wall, hidden in the shadow of the gable alone, I let my eyes wander dreamily over the shadowy landscape and up at the midnight sky.

The woman never lived who did not sometimes indulge in an idle dream, and for awhile my thoughts played havoc with reality. They were recalled suddenly by the sound of voices in the garden below. I glanced downward, and on the border of the path in front of the villa I saw two men standing talking.

One I knew at once, for the moonlight shone full upon his uncovered head. It was Mr. Carlyon. But his companion stood somewhat in the shadow of a thick shrub, and except that he was tall and wore a long ulster and cap, I could see nothing of him. They had moved to within easy hearing of where I was, but I could not escape into the room without being seen from below, and as I naturally did not desire this I stayed where I was, listening, at first against my wish, it is true. But afterward I had not that excuse.

"I never was so surprised in my life to see any one, old chap," I heard Arthur Carlyon say, his loud boyish tones a little hushed, but still perfectly audible to me. "The last time I heard from home the mater said that the latest report about you was that you were—well, in a queer state. You were nearly drowned, weren't you? Tell us all about it."

There was a brief silence, broken by the low, clear tones of the other man. It was strange, incredible, preposterous! And yet, at his first words, I held my breath and felt my heart beat fast. Something in the *timbre* of his voice seemed to fall upon my ears with a curious sense of familiarity, and I leaned forward eagerly, straining my eyes through the darkness. But it was of no avail. I could distinguish nothing save the dim outline of the speaker, and that recalled nothing to me. It told me nothing, save that he was tall. Surely it was impossible—more than impossible, absurd! But though

it seemed so, my heart still beat fast, and with my fingers locked nervously in the branches of the stephanotis which hung around the window, I leaned eagerly forward as far as I could. Afterward it seemed to me that I was very foolish. Even supposing that it were he, what concern was it of mine? Was it not a matter for reproach that even the bare possibility should have so agitated me? What was he to me, or I to him, then?

"There is not much to tell," I heard the new-comer say slowly. "I was down at Clanavon Castle, that queer old place on the Northumbrian coast that my father was so fond of, looking through some papers which he had left there, and I took it into my head to explore some secret passages with the son of the housekeeper, who I thought would know all about them. Unfortunately he didn't, as the event proved."

"You were nearly drowned, weren't you?" Arthur Carlyon interrupted.

"Yes, we were. You see, we got landed in a very small cave just as the tide was coming in, and we were completely trapped. The passage by which we had come was submerged before we thought of turning back, and so our only retreat was cut off, and the tide was coming in fast."

"Couldn't you get away by the cliffs?"

"They were inaccessible. We couldn't even clamber a few feet up them. We could do nothing but wait till the last thing and then swim. There was scarcely a breath in my body when I was thrown up on the beach. I had lost consciousness and given up swimming long before. The man who was with me was picked up by an incoming fishing boat."

"And was he alive?"

"Just. He had a very close shave of it, but he's getting better now. I was almost given up myself at one time, but I just managed to pull through, and directly I was strong enough to travel the doctor ordered me to the South of France."

"But what on earth made you come to this out-of-the-way hole? Did you know that we were here?"

"Not until last week. I was at Nice then, and I had a letter from your mother, telling me that you were here with your tutor. I had other reasons for wanting to see this place, so I came over and have put up at the Leon d'Or for a few days."

"Our hotel! How jolly! I say, Bernard, you'll forgive my asking, won't you?" Arthur Carlyon continued, seriously, "but has anything been discovered yet—your father, you know. Have they found Neillson?"

The answer was so low that I could not catch it. But I gathered from the indignant nature of Mr. Carlyon's observations that it was not a satisfactory one.

"The blockheads! Stupid louts! It must make you feel wild, Bernard! Why, I believe it would send me mad if I were you, and there was a chance of the fellow being discovered."

"There is very little chance that he will be now," was the quiet answer.

"I'm beastly sorry, old chap! Perhaps I oughtn't to talk to you about it. You dont look strong enough to stand much. But I couldn't help saying that."

"Thank you, Arthur. We won't talk about it any more, if you don't mind. Besides, there's something else I want to say to you."

He dropped his voice a little, and I could not hear what he said. But apparently it was something which displeased Arthur Carlyon.

"It's all nonsense, you know, Bernard," I heard him say, testily. "You seem to think that Brown and I are a pair of babies, and that's going a little too far, you know. We can take care of ourselves, I can assure you. Besides, you don't know what you're talking about, in the present case, at least. Our host there is a gentleman and a scholar, and I consider our invitation here a great compliment. I heard them talking about him in the casino this morning. He spends all his time in his library or among the poor people, they say. You're all wrong, I can assure you."

There was a brief silence, and I felt my cheeks grow hot, notwithstanding the cool, sweet breeze which swept

softly over my face and rustled among the creepers and the shrubs. Then I heard the answering voice.

"Arthur, listen to me! I'm an older man than you, and I know more of the world. At any rate, I know more what I'm talking about in the present instance. These Continental watering places, especially the smaller ones, such as St. Marien, are simply hot-beds of gambling, the refuge and haunt of the lowest class of swindlers who have probably made the more fashionable resorts too hot for them. Of your host I know nothing—not even his name. The house was pointed out to me, and that is all. I say nothing against him—he may be as you say, a gentleman. No doubt he is, but that man, d'Aubron, whom I am told that you are intimate with, is nothing more nor less than a dangerous adventurer, a man who lives by his wits and by his skill at cards upon such boys as you. General Erle saw you with him this morning, and as he had not had an opportunity to warn you himself, he told me about it immediately I arrived. If Mr. Brown has suffered you to associate with him, and has gone with you to his rooms, I shall write and advise your father to change your tutor at once."

"You can do as you choose," Arthur Carlyon answered hotly. "I don't care. Old Erle always was a meddlesome idiot, and I don't believe he knows what he's talking about."

"General Erle is not an idiot, and men in his position, and with his regard for the truth, are not in the haibt of making reckless assertions," was the stern reply. "Besides, he's a friend of your father's."

"Well, I'm not with D'Aubron now, at any rate, am I?" protested Arthur Carlyon. "He went away an hour ago."

"Oh, he has been here, then?" remarked the other.

"Yes, he dined here."

"And your host is a resident here? As such, Arthur, he must have known the fellow's character. Look here. Will you send in your excuses and come round to my hotel and talk it over there?"

"Certainly not. You talk to me as though I were a child."

"I shouldn't be here talking to you at all, Arthur, if I hadn't promised your mother that I would look after you. I have plenty of troubles of my own to occupy me, God knows."

Arthur Carlyon's tone changed at once.

"I know you have, old chap," he said, "and of course it's very good of you to bother about me at all. But don't you think that you're a little bit unreasonable in the present case? I do really. I can't help it."

"You won't come with me, then?"

"Not now. I am M. de Feurget's guest for the evening."

"Then perhaps you will take me in and introduce me. I shall— Good God!"

Arthur Carlyon's mysterious companion had changed his position suddenly, and the last exclamation had burst from trembling lips, and in a tone which had suddenly become hoarse with agitation. His cousin looked at him in amazement, and then, following his horror-struck riveted gaze, turned round. I, too, seeing a shadow cast between the two upon the grass, leaned over the balcony, and saw my father with his head uncovered standing in the lower window, with a cigarette between his teeth.

"Let me introduce my host, Monsieur de Feurget, to you, Bernard," said Arthur Carlyon, with a sudden access of dignity into his boyish manner. "Monsieur de Feurget, this is my cousin, the Earl of Alceston."

CHAPTER V.

MR. CARLYON'S COUSIN.

NEVER, though my memory should yield up everything else which a stormy life has left imprinted upon it, shall I forget that little scene. My father, although his manner when he did come in contact with new acquaintances was always quietly courteous, stood perfectly still with-

out moving even a feature, and with his cigarette still between his teeth. He did not appear to have heard the words of introduction. There was not the slightest smile of welcome upon his lips. His hands, instead of being outstretched, hung nervelessly by his side, and he did not advance a single step forward. The only change in his appearance was a curious glitter in his dark eyes and a slight compression of his thin, colorless lips.

A few feet away from him, Lord Alceston stood. I could see him plainly now, but had I not heard his voice and his name, I might with reason have doubted whether it were indeed he. The face was paler by far than when I had seen him last, and his form, though still erect and graceful, was shrunken and thin. His cheeks, too, were hollow, and his face seemed sharpened. He was standing now with his lips a little parted, and one hand raised to his head; and God forbid that I should ever again see such a look of horror on human face as was distorting his features as his eyes rested upon my father. It came and went like a flash. But I saw it, and it seemed to me that they must see it too. Between them Arthur Carlyon stood glancing from one to the other in blank bewilderment.

"Have either of you seen a ghost—or both—or what?" he asked, breaking a silence which, had it lasted much longer, I myself must have broken with a shriek. "Bernard, old chap, don't you feel well?"

It was all over. Lord Alceston seemed galvanized out of his stupor and was once more the well-bred *dilettante* man of the world. My father, too, had regained his naturally easy manners, and the usual courtesies passed between the two men. But I noticed that when my father's hand touched Lord Alceston's it seemed to send a shiver through his frame, and he dropped it as speedily as possible. There were a few words of invitation, a brief acceptance, and the three men stepped into the room from which my father had come.

What could have passed between them to cause the momentary agitation which both had betrayed? The

more I wondered, the more inexplicable the whole thing seemed. I sat in my rocking-chair thinking, until my whole brain whirled and my reasoning powers were reduced to utter confusion. Then at last, moved by a sudden impulse, I started up, and wrapping a long dark cloak around me, I stole softly from the room, downstairs, and out of the open door into the garden.

CHAPTER VI.

A STRANGE CONVERSATION.

SITUATED as our cottage was, at a considerable distance from any thoroughfare, our blinds were always left undrawn, and our windows wide open in order to enjoy as much as possible the faint but fragrant night breeze. And so from the edge of the shrubbery fringing the lawn, where I had taken up my station, I could see with ease into the room where my father and his guests were.

At the further end Mr. Brown and my father were examining together a little pile of musty volumes, which I recognized as part of my father's choicest stock of rare books and first editions. Both seemed entirely engrossed in their occupation, and my father was evidently holding forth concerning his favorites to Mr. Brown with considerable warmth. It is strange how his appearance changes at times. Then, with his lips parted in a slight smile, and a bright, keen light in his eyes, he seemed transformed. Although his face was aged and his brow furrowed, their disfigurement appeared more like the becoming traces of a studious life than the indelible marks of a deep sorrow and an ever-torturing anxiety. His upright mien, too, gave him a greater air of dignity than was usual. It was evident that in the keen enjoyment of conversation with a sympathizer in his literary tastes he had forgotten for a while that other portion of his life which at times laid hold of him so powerfully, and which seemed to oppress

him like a nightmare. I could not keep back a sigh of regret as I looked at him. If only he would be always like this! If only that other self, so mysterious, so depressing, would fall away! Life would be a very different thing for me if only this could come to pass. . . .

A little way apart from my father and Mr. Brown, and nearer the window, Mr. Carlyon and Lord Alceston were talking together in a low tone. I could not overhear what they were saying, nor did I try to do so. But it seemed to me that their conversation was no very important one, and I noticed that every now and then Lord Alceston cast a furtive yet impatient glance toward my father, as though anxious to speak with him.

Presently a servant brought in a tray with some tea and other refreshments, and in the slight stir which followed, the relative positions of the occupants of the room were changed.

While every one's attention was thus momentarily absorbed I saw Lord Alceston cross the room and whisper something in my father's ear. My father started, and I saw a strange look flash into his eyes and across his face. He hesitated only for a minute, however, then rising to his feet he followed Lord Alceston to the window. They stood talking there for a minute or two in a low tone, during which my father was chiefly the listener, and presently they moved forward together as though by common consent into the garden, only just giving me time to get behind a shrub before they were close upon me.

"Now, my lord, we are secure from listeners," my father said in a low, suppressed tone, "perhaps you can explain yourself here."

"As well here as anywhere," Lord Alceston answered. "I have very little explanation to give, though. I simply want to ask you a question."

"If it is one which I can answer I shall be glad to do so," my father declared quietly.

"There is no doubt about you being able to, Monsieur de Feurget," Lord Alceston said earnestly, "and a great deal to me depends upon your answer. It has reference

partly to something which happened a very long time ago."

My father bowed his head without remark, and Lord Alceston proceeded.

"It is a strange thing, Monsieur de Feurget, that you and I should meet here. If what I am told is true, there was a tragedy played out upon that lawn, more than twenty years ago, in which my father was one who figured most unhappily, and there was a Monsieur de Feurget there too! Are you he?"

"Yes! It was I."

My father's voice was calm and expressionless, yet I, who was watching him closely, could see in the clear moonlight the gray pallor creep into his face and the old look of trouble into his eyes.

"You were the Count d'Augerville's second, then?"

"I was. Not because I had any faith or sympathy in the justice of his cause, but because there was none else at hand; and besides, he had claims upon me."

"You were a friend of the household, Monsieur de Feurget? You knew his daughters?"

"Naturally. I was engaged to marry one of them."

"And you did marry her?"

"I did!"

"It was Marie, was it not?"

"Yes. The other, Cecile, was married to your father."

Lord Alceston paused for a minute, but I knew that the conversation was not yet at an end—that it had not yet, indeed, reached its climax. It seemed to me that he was nerving himself to ask a question, the answer to which he dreaded. At last it came, and I knew that I was right. For his voice had lost the quiet, easy ring, and the words came hastily, almost indistinctly, from tremulous lips.

"Monsieur de Feurget, can you tell me this? When did she—Cecile—my father's wife, die?"

It seemed to me that my father shrank from answering, almost as much as Lord Alceston had from asking this question. A ghastly shade passed over his face, and he turned his head away.

"Lord Alceston, you had better not ask that question—of me. It will be better for you not to know," he said slowly. "It will, indeed."

"Monsieur de Feurget, I must know," was the grave answer. "It is necessary. Let me put it to you in this way. On that awful night when my father was murdered, there was a brutal crime committed in the East End. A woman, an unknown woman, was murdered in a most mysterious manner by a man whom it was proved had deliberately sought her out with that intention. You remember this?"

"Perfectly," my father answered. "I have reason to."

"Just so. You have reason to," Lord Alceston repeated. "You yourself, for some cause or another, were interested in this affair. At the inquest, you presented yourself and attempted to identify the dead woman. In this you were so far successful that on the ground of having met her once abroad, or some other equally insufficient pretext, you were allowed to undertake the expense of her funeral, and not only did you attend it yourself, but you did so in company with your daughter, Mademoiselle de Feurget."

My father's manner was changing rapidly. The unnatural calm had gone, and he looked anxious—even fearful. The tone of his answer, too, was sharp and suspicious.

"How did you know that?" he asked quickly. "My name did not appear in the paper."

"No; because you gave a false one," Lord Alceston answered. "But I know you may have had very good reasons for doing so! I am not your judge with regard to them. Only I know. And now, Monsieur de Feurget," he continued, laying his hand upon my father's shoulder, "tell me this, and for God's sake tell me quickly! Who was that woman?"

There was a short silence—short, but so intense that, while I crouched there with my eyes fixed upon the two men, I could hear the quick, hurried beating of my heart. At last, to my unutterable relief, my father

broke the deep silence. Had it lasted but a few moments longer, I must have shrieked, for the tension upon my already overwrought nerves was nearly too much for me.

"You ask that question, Lord Alceston," he said, "with great confidence—almost as though you had some right to ask it. Yet, for your own sake, I would advise you not to press for an answer."

"An answer I will have," Lord Alceston said, his voice trembling with emotion. "I am told, Monsieur de Feurget, that that woman was Cecile d'Augerville, my father's wife. Was this so? You knew her, and you saw the dead body. Was this so?"

"It was."

There was a brief but awful silence. Lord Alceston stood with his face covered in his hands for a full minute. I would have given, oh, I would have given the world to have been able to go to him and try to comfort him. But I dared not, though the tears were in my eyes.

"Why did you not identify her?" Lord Alceston asked presently.

My father shrugged his shoulders gravely.

"Who would have been the gainer? I knew that your father had been deceived, and that he had married again. To have published the identity of the murdered woman would have been to bring disgrace upon you and profited no one. So I kept the secret."

"And, Monsieur de Feurget, how was it that you had any idea at all that the murdered woman in an East End lodging-house was your sister-in-law?"

"I will tell you. Just before my wife died she discovered that her sister was still living, and she made me promise to do my best to prevent her from declaring herself, and not to let her come to England if I could help it. I discovered that she had left for London and followed her. I had almost traced her out when I read of this murder in the vicinity where I knew she was. An impulse prompted me to go and look at the body. It was a terrible shock to me when I recognized her."

There was a question which Lord Alceston tried more than once to ask, but seemed to lack the courage. At last he asked it in a low, nervous tone.

"Have you any idea—any theory—as to the murderer?"

The question seemed to agitate my father almost as much as Lord Alceston. He was white to the very lips, and for several moments failed to answer it.

"We had better not discuss that, I think," he said hoarsely. "We may have our ideas. Let us keep them to ourselves. It is not a thing to be whispered about."

Again there was a brief silence, which my father broke, speaking in a somewhat lighter tone.

"Come, let us go inside. I have neglected my guests long enough."

Lord Alceston remained for a moment without moving. Then my father went and laid his hand upon his arm.

"Pray come in, my lord," he said earnestly. "Remember that we two alone know of this thing, and with me it is buried."

Lord Alceston roused himself, as though with an effort.

"Thank you, Monsieur de Feurget. Yes, I will come in with you. But just one word on another subject. Monsieur d'Aubron was a guest of yours this evening?"

"Yes, he was; but neither a frequent nor a welcome one. In fact, it was his first and last visit."

"I am glad of it. I heard at the hotel that my cousin had been seen playing with him."

"I saw them playing together at the casino," my father answered, "and heard Mr. Carlyon promise to go to his rooms to-night. I knew that that would be a dangerous visit for your cousin, and he seems a nice boy; so I got them to come here instead, and have had the pleasure of balking Monsieur d'Aubron's little game."

I felt a great sense of relief at my father's words, for I saw that Lord Alceston was satisfied. The two men moved slowly away, and disappeared through the open window. Then I rose up, cramped and stiff, and softly crossing the lawn made my way to my room.

CHAPTER VII.

A VAIN APPEAL.

I SLEPT badly that night, and remained in my room till late on the following morning. When I descended, just before lunch-time, I found my father out on the balcony alone, lolling in a low basket-chair and lazily rolling a cigarette. I went out to him at once, full of the purpose which was in my mind.

He nodded a brief good-morning to me, and went on with his task. I watched him for a few moments in silence. Then I drew a chair out to his side and sat down.

"I hope you are not going out this morning, *mon père*," I said. "I want to talk to you."

He looked at me searchingly from out of his half-closed eyes, as though trying to read what was in my thoughts. But I had nerved myself to my task, and my eyes met his steadily.

"No, I am not going out yet," he answered. "My time is at your disposal. What do you want to say to me, child? Is it a new dress, or a hat from Madame Faveur's, or a bracelet, or what?"

I shook my head a little sadly.

"It is none of these things, *mon père*," I said. "I have plenty of all of them."

"Then what is it?"

I took his hands in mine and stroked them.

"*Mon père*," I cried softly, "I am not happy."

"Not happy!" He repeated the words lingeringly, as though he found some sort of mockery in them. Then he looked steadily at me.

"Will you explain?"

"I will try," I answered, with a sigh, for his manner was not encouraging. "Do you suppose, *mon père*, that a girl of my age can be happy without a single companion or relation and living somehow under a cloud? No, I am not happy. I am miserable."

"I am sorry for it," he said, a little coldly. "I have done my best for you."

"I think you have, *mon père*, and I am grateful to you—very grateful. But, all the same, I am not happy," I confessed sadly.

"Will you try and explain yourself further?" he said.

"I will if I can," I answered. "Let me try and put my life before you."

I was silent for a few minutes, collecting my thoughts. When I was ready to commence his face did not please me. Its expression was hard and cold, and there was no promise of sympathy in it. But my mind was firmly made up, and no words or looks of his would have stopped me.

"I don't think I remember anything before the convent," I began. "I must have gone there when I was very young indeed."

"You were five years old," my father interrupted.

"Ah! I could not have been older. From the very first there seemed to be something strange about me. The other girls had all of them their fathers and mothers and brothers to talk about—had, many of them, the same circle of friends—and were always looking forward to holidays and *fête* days when they went home or their friends came to see them. With me it was all very different. I alone had neither relations nor friends nor home."

"You had me," my father interrupted.

"Yes, I had you. But how often did you come to see me, and how long did you stop when you did come?"

"I was hard at work earning money to keep you at the convent. Madame Duquevilie's charges were not low, and I was poor then."

"I am not grumbling, *mon père*, far from it. I only want you to see how lonely I was there, and how strange my position was. I had no idea even as to what my father's position was, or to what rank of life he belonged. Nor did I know anything of my mother. Sometimes, when I tried very hard to remember a little about my earlier childhood, I had dim—very dim—visions."

I paused, and let my eyes wander thoughtfully away, over the pleasant gardens and the bending pine trees to the long streak of blue sea far away in the distance. My father started a little at my last words, and letting fall his cigarette, leaned forward toward me with a half-questioning, half-startled light in his dark eyes.

"Visions? Memories? Bah! you can remember nothing!" he exclaimed.

"No, that is true," I answered, with a sigh. "There is only one thing I want to remember: my mother's face—and that I cannot. Will you not tell me something about her, *mon père?*"

He stood over me with flashing eyes and trembling lips.

"Marie! Did I not forbid you ever to mention her name? She is dead, I tell you, and that is enough. She died when you were a baby."

"You will tell me nothing about her; you keep me ignorant of everything," I cried sadly. "Oh, *mon père*, I will complain no longer at our lonely life, I will worry you for nothing. I will content myself if only you will give me one thing—your trust, your confidence. I hear you walk restlessly up and down your room all night long; I see you shun all society and live alone, that you may hug the closer some secret sorrow; I see the lines and scars of a great grief written into your face, and I know nothing of it. I can offer you no sympathy, no comfort. I must live on, friendless and lonely, miserable in the shadow of your trouble. Only let me really share it and I will be brave—I will complain no more."

He turned away from me, and shook his head sadly.

"I cannot, child. It is impossible. The weight of it would crush you."

"Try me," I cried eagerly.

"I cannot."

"Then, for God's sake, let me go back to the convent again!" I cried passionately. "Let me go somewhere—away from here."

"Back to the convent! No, child, you must stop here. What could you do there at your age?"

"I could teach—teach music, and singing, and English enough for the little ones. At any rate, I should be no longer a trouble to you," I cried bitterly.

My father was very pale, and the hand which held his long cigarette shook. At first I thought that it was anger; since I have thought that it may have been some other emotion.

"I am sorry that you are so unhappy," he said slowly. "I did not know it. It is a new idea to me. I must think it all over, and we must talk again. I will see whether we cannot make some change."

And with these words he left me.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FEARFUL SECRET. "WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH IT?"

I KNOW all now. Neillson's story, told to me while we were clinging to the rock together on that terrible night, is true, word for word. Not that I ever doubted it; dying men seldom lie. But it all sounded so much like a wild romance that at times I almost fancied afterward that the whole story must have been some hideous nightmare which had stamped itself on my brain during one of the stages of the fever which nearly ended my days after my wonderful escape at Clanavon. But all doubt has gone now. Unwillingly enough, M. de Feurget has corroborated the facts. Cecile d'Augerville's vengeance has been a terrible one, indeed. Of my father I dare not think; neither of my mother, nor of myself. M. de Feurget's advice was good. I will take a little time to consider this matter before I act.

What have I done, I wonder, that Fate should apply such exquisite torture as well as heap such troubles upon my head? For months I struggled against the haunting memories of her face—and now, at the moment of my despair, Fate brings us together again, and tempts me even to madness. I thought her beautiful,

even when I saw her in a dingy-looking lodging-house; here, wandering about those gardens by moonlight with her and out on the breezy cliffs seems like a breath of paradise to me. Fool that I am to revel in a joy which must fade away into bitter regret if ever I put out my hand to grasp it. And yet it is too late to be wise now—too late when the touch of her fingers, a single glance from her eyes, or a word from her lips, can bring joy bounding into my heart and send the blood coursing fiercely through my brains! Too late—too late! I love her—I, who have nothing for a heritage but shame, who have not even a name to give her. . . .

I have been to see my mother. May God grant that some day the memory of that visit may fade away! She was at Gorton Park, in Leicestershire, always her favorite place, though my father seldom cared to go there. It was too much out of the world for him. For my mother, in her present condition, it seems the most fitting abode. Every word we spoke, and every little detail of our interview, are still burning in my brain. What relief can I hope to gain by writing it down? I scarcely know, and yet something prompts me to do so.

It was night when I arrived, and I was faint and tired with travelling night and day and with the exhaustion of tormenting thoughts. When they told me that her ladyship kept to her own suite of rooms, and that I was to dine alone, I think that I was glad. And yet it was an awful time I had in the old picture gallery, with Groves behind my chair, talking all the time and worrying because I could eat nothing. Sometimes I wonder that I keep sane—that my hot blood does not boil into a fever and my mind lose its balance. Trouble I could face, I think, as well as most men; but surely this thing that has come to me is outside the bounds of such things as men call trouble!

That night was like a night in hell to me. All round me, as I sat at that miserable meal, were the dark, stern faces of the Alcestons and Clanavons of former days, and it seemed to me that as the firelight flashed upon the oaken panels and time-stained canvases they were frown-

ing down upon me as upon a usurper. It may be that my agony is stirring up strange fancies in my brain—it may be so. But it was a horrible thought!

Then came that meeting—that dreadful interview. I found her sitting alone by the fireside in a darkened room, unlit even by a single candle. But oh! the terrible look in her face! It makes my heart ache and throb with pity even now when I think of the agony which she must have suffered to have left such a stamp upon her features. Am I as much changed, I wonder? I look in the glass and I see deep furrows lining my forehead, black lines under my eyes, and hollows in my cheeks. Yet these all seem as nothing when I think of her branded face.

She drew me to her and kissed me quietly, and I stood by her side, holding her hand in mine. But her lips were as cold as ice, and her eyes were dry and burning. Alas! I fear that her tears were all shed.

"Mother," I said, "I have much to tell you. I know everything."

"I did my best to keep it from you," she answered.

"I know it. I should have done well to have taken your advice. It is too late now."

"Yes, it is too late now," she repeated, mechanically.

I stood back and spoke to her from among the shadows of the dim firelight.

"It was from Neillson that I heard it first. I had no idea that he was in hiding there when I went to Clanavon Castle. You know, mother, what I told you when you refused to let me share the full knowledge of this awful thing with you?"

"You swore that you would find out all for yourself. Oh, Bernard, my son! Bernard, why could you not have taken my word? You might have been spared all this misery."

I shook my head sorrowfully.

"I could not have rested, mother, until I had discovered everything," I told her. "The vague hint which you had given me—for it was nothing more, after all, than a hint—was working within me like a poison.

I could neither sleep nor rest. I was more determined even than before to find out everything, only instead of working openly I saw that I must do so secretly. You would not help me; you only threw obstacles in my way. It was the uncertainty of it which tortured me most. It seemed to me that my father must be a man above suspicion. Whatever the cloud was, it could be cleared away. So I went to work. I went first to Mr. Brudnell, but he would tell me nothing. Then I determined to search my father's papers, and as those at Grosvenor Square had already been gone through, I went down to Clanavon Castle."

"It was Fate," my mother murmured.

"It seemed to me that Mrs. Smith behaved curiously about the key of the tower room, and down in the village they told strange tales of a light burning there at night. I, myself, saw it, and I became suspicious—of what I scarcely knew. I discovered certain proofs that the room had been recently inhabited, and I laid my plans. Hours after they had all gone to rest I rose softly and commenced a rigid search of the apartment. I need only tell you whom I found in hiding there. To my horror and amazement it was Neillson. He fled at the sight of me through a secret passage. When, at last, I caught him, we found ourselves like rats in a trap. The incoming tide had shut off our retreat, and when all hope seemed over, and we stood on the threshold of death, he told me all. He told me, believing that life was over for both of us, and that I should carry this hideous secret in my heart for a few short minutes only."

"He should not have told you; not even then," she said, softly.

"He told it me to make death easier," I answered; "and it seemed then that it was so. That we escaped with our lives seems to me now nothing short of a miracle. When I recovered consciousness and they told me Neillson too lived, I could scarcely believe it. He was still dangerously ill, though, when I left Clanavon. Have you heard whether he is alive?"

"I had a letter from Mrs. Smith this morning," my

mother said. "He is better, and talks of taking a journey."

"Is it safe for him?" I asked.

"His mother tells me that she herself could scarcely recognize him. He is wasted to a shadow and quite gray."

"Poor fellow!"

"Poor fellow, indeed! Yet his reward is to come. Much is promised to those who are 'faithful unto death.'"

"Faithful unto death." She repeated the words with a suddenly softened look in her worn face, as though there were something in the thought of it pleasant to her. Could it be that she, too, was looking forward to that last release from the burden of our terrible secret? The thought made me shudder, and yet, after all, was it not natural? Had I not, too, had the same wish?

"Mother," I said, "I have more to tell you. You knew about that story of the past?"

She bowed her head.

"I knew all."

"You remember about the duel? About——"

She stopped me with a shudder.

"I knew all," she repeated.

"You know the name of the woman who was murdered on that same awful night? You can connect—you have connected in your mind—that deed with the history of those distant days?"

"Alas! I have," she whispered, with a deep shudder.

"Neillson, too, saw that woman, and recognized Marie d'Augerville. He knows."

"My God!"

"He knows, but he will not speak. The secret is in our hands—yours and mine."

"What shall we do with it?"

"Ay, mother, you may well ask. It is in our own hands, to seal our own doom or to carry it with us to the grave."

She did not speak. I knelt down by her side and took her hands. They hung passively in mine. The glow of the fire was upon them, but they were cold.

"Another knows of it, you say? What does he bid you do?"

"Carry it to the grave. If we speak, who is the gainer? Who is there to profit by our shame? None. There is no male heir. The estates would go to the crown. If I die childless they also go to the crown. So must it be."

"He advises that?"

"Yes; and, mother, we must think of this. If we disclose one half of our secret we imperil the other—the darker half. Her identity would be established. The coincidence of the two deaths on one night would suggest—would give rise to speculation. The rest might follow."

"He is right. Bernard, my son, life is over for us both. For me, the worst is already past. The chords of my life are almost severed. I shall die. But you—all your life—God help you; if there be a God. Amen."

Then she gave a little low cry and sank into my arms. At first I thought it was death. But she recovered presently. . . .

In the morning she sent me away. We could bear it better apart for a while, she thought, without the sight of each other's misery. When she wanted me she would send for me.

CHAPTER IX.

MAD MOMENTS.

I AM a most unfortunate girl. I think that Nature meant me to be light-hearted, but Fate is handicapping me in a most unfair manner. My father's gloomy ways have been hard enough to bear; now I find that Lord Alceston is very much the same. Thus it happens that the two men who, at present, make up the sum of my little existence are both melancholy mad.

I am going to make a most shocking and unnatural confession. My sympathies are more with Lord Alceston than with my father. My father is kind and gentle

to every one else in the world, so that the poor people around love him more even than their own *curé*. To me alone he is cold and unresponsive. I fear that he does not love me. Why it is so, or whose fault it is, I cannot tell. But there is between us always a barrier, a restraint, which no effort of mine can remove.

It is strange what a violent fancy my father seems to have taken to Lord Alceston. Does he return it, I wonder? I suppose he does, or he would not come here so often. If I were a very, very foolish girl I might imagine—perhaps—but then I'm not foolish, and I don't imagine anything of the sort.

He does come often, though, and his coming makes it pleasanter. Sometimes I sing to him, and he seems to like that. Sometimes my father and he play chess, but they never finish a game. One or the other goes off into a deep fit of thought, and unless I go to the rescue, and clear the chessmen away, and take Lord Alceston off, the whole evening passes while they sit there. I take care that that doesn't happen often, of course. Sometimes Lord Alceston brings Mr. Carlyon with him, and sometimes Mr. Carlyon comes alone, though it isn't often he can summon up courage, for though he doesn't like to be told so he's a very shy boy. Very—very seldom now my father goes to the casino. On those nights Lord Alceston stays away.

I am afraid that I am getting a very silly girl. The other evening we expected Lord Alceston, and he did not come. It seemed such a slight thing for him to miss one evening, and yet I felt as disappointed as though some great trouble had come. I sat down and began to think about it. I am very much afraid that I am courting a great trial. It is not likely that he would ever care for me—in that way; and yet I am quite sure that as long as I live I shall never care for any other man! I am not half so sorry as I ought to be for this terrible trouble of his. Somehow, it seems to bring me nearer to him—to make the distance between us less. . . .

My father called me to him the other morning and said that he wished to talk to me about the request which I had made him, that I might go back to the convent. I am afraid that he saw my consternation. Strange what a change has come to me in so short a time. A few weeks ago I was longing to be away. Now it seems to me that I am perfectly and absolutely contented, so much so that the very mention or thought of going away fills me with alarm.

He had thought over my wish, he said, and he had come to the conclusion that perhaps he had not been considerate enough for me. Perhaps——

He broke off in the middle of his sentence, and sat gazing idly out of the open window. We had been dining together alone at a little round table half out on the veranda, and the fruit and wine and cigarettes still remained on the white cloth. It was a wonderfully still night. It was all very beautiful. But when I looked away toward my father, wondering why he did not finish his sentence, the memory of it all faded away from me and a great fear shook my heart. His face was pale, and rigid as death. His lips were white as the spotless *serviette* which he clinched fiercely in one hand. His body seemed to have shrunk a little back in his low chair, but his head was thrust forward, full of an unutterable horror, and his eyes were riveted upon a certain spot in the garden. A great fear seized me and held me speechless, but my eyes followed the direction of his spell-bound gaze, and I saw the figure of a man standing upon the lawn, looking toward us. He wore a long dark cloak, and he held his hat in his hand as though to relieve his forehead for a minute from its weight. I knew who it was in a moment, and waved my hand.

"Father," I said, "don't you——"

I had turned toward him, and his look seemed to freeze the words on my lips. Great drops of perspiration were bursting out upon his forehead, and he had stretched out his hands in a wild, convulsive gesture of terror which no words could express.

"*Mon père!*" I cried. "What is the matter? Are you ill? Don't you see Lord Alceston?"

He neither spoke, nor moved, nor changed his attitude. Lord Alceston, seeing that something was wrong, waved his hand to me, and came hurrying across the lawn. When he arrived, my father had fallen forward with a cry which seemed to rend the silent night air, and was lying senseless at my feet.

Lord Alceston was very good. He pushed the servants out of the way, and took my father up in his arms as though he had been a baby, and carried him to his room. It was only a faint, and it did not last long. When he recovered, however, he bade us leave him alone for a while. He would try to sleep, he said. So we went downstairs, and Lord Alceston and I sat out on the balcony and talked.

"I am afraid your father is like me in one respect, Miss de Feurget," he said softly, after a long silence. "He has troubles in his life which do not lie on the surface."

"My father frightens me sometimes," I told him. "I know that there must be something terrible in his past. At times he seems almost on the verge of madness, and I know nothing. Whatever it is, it seems to me that I should be less unhappy if I knew it."

"It must be bad for you, living so much alone with him," he said pityingly. "You must be terribly lonely sometimes."

"I have been," I said, "but not lately."

The last few words I meant to say to myself, but he heard them. I saw a sudden light leap into his eyes, and they gleamed for a moment strangely in the moonlight. But he said nothing—and my heart sank. He never would. I knew it. His secret would keep his lips sealed—even if he ever did care for me.

There was a long pause. Then he spoke again.

"You have some compensations," he said. "Yours is a beautiful home."

"Yes."

"I shall always think of it—when I have gone."

"Are you going away?" I asked quickly. Then the color streamed into my face, for he must have heard the fear in my tone. But if he did, he never noticed it. He kept his face turned resolutely away from me. My heart sank low, and if he had looked he must have seen the tears glistening in my eyes.

"I cannot stay here always," he said.

"But you are not going yet?" I asked anxiously.

He stood up, and his face looked ghastly pale in the moonlight.

"Yes, I must go soon," he said, "very soon, Miss de Feurget. I am not quite sane to-night, I think. If I stay here I shall say more than I ought."

"Then stay," I whispered, resting my hand upon his arm.

I ought not to have done it, I know. It was very wrong of me, and my punishment was swift. But was it punishment? Ah! well, I won't say. Only this is what happened. I felt myself grasped by a pair of strong arms, and I heard broken, passionate words bursting from his lips which sounded to me like the sweetest music, and—and—but the rest I cannot tell.

CHAPTER X.

NEILLSON'S DREAM.

For a man of my humble birth I, Philip Neillson, have passed through a strange and checkered life, and now in the autumn of my days can look back upon a series of remarkable incidents such as few men know of. But there is one which, far above all the rest, I find myself often pondering upon, partly because there is no man in this enlightened world, be he philosopher, or man of science, or book-learned, who can explain it to me, partly because it is one of those marvellous instances which sometimes occur showing by what slight means great mysteries may be solved.

It is my object here to set down in writing only that incident, and what followed thereon. The other awful

events in my life I do not here intend to dwell upon. I told them once to my young master when hideous death stared us in the face and we seemed to be on the threshold of eternity, and since then I have told them to no one; nor shall I ever.

It was four months after my young master, Lord Bernard, and I were carried by the tide, more dead than alive, on to the beach below Clanavon Castle. My recovery, unaided as I was by his vigorous constitution and hardened frame, trained to all manner of athletic exercises, was very slow indeed, and I was still only able to crawl about with the aid of a strong stick and by leaning on my sister's arm. I was, of course, in a weak, nervous state, and very susceptible to any mental derangement; but what happened could have had no connection with my state of health for a very obvious reason.

All through the weary period of my illness my sleep at nights had been constantly broken by horrible dreams and nightmares, most of them bearing on the tragical episodes in which I had been one of the minor figures. But as I regained a little strength, and was able to take more exercise, they grew less and less frequent, until I was almost altogether free of them. For a fortnight I had slept peacefully and undisturbed; then one night I had a strange dream, or rather a vision.

It was no nightmare, full of lurid coloring and fierce sensation. It could scarcely be called a dream, because there was in it no sequence of events or moving figures. It was a vision. Before my eyes, utterly devoid of any connection with any person or surroundings, standing as it were in a chaos of its own, I saw a single object—a plain gold bracelet. When I awoke I thought of it as curious, and no more. During the day it vanished altogether from my memory. But at night a strange thing happened. The vision was reproduced in an exactly similar manner.

This time it set me thinking, but, strangely enough, to no immediate purpose. I could not connect the bracelet with any tangible train of circumstances. It is strange that I failed to do so, but so it was.

On the third night the vision came to me again, but in a different manner. This time the bracelet was clasped high up on the white cold arm of a sleeping or dead woman. It seemed to me in my vision that this time the bracelet seemed to recall something to my mind.

I thought of a morning far back in the past, when I had entered my young master's dressing-room and found him bending with flushed, handsome face over two morocco cases which had just arrived from a jeweller in Paris. They were open, and while I was pouring the water into his bath and making preparations for his toilette, I had a good view of them. They both contained gold bracelets, exactly similar in every respect. Very soon afterward I became aware that my master was wearing one on his right arm. The other I know that he presented to Mademoiselle d'Augerville.

The whole vision of that morning and of the two bracelets passed before my eyes like a flash. Then, again, I found myself with my eyes riveted upon that motionless white arm with its plain gold band. It seemed to me that it was exactly similar to those other two, save in one small respect. There was a little round knob near the fastening, which showed where it opened. On the others the design had evidently been to avoid showing this, and thus carry to its extreme the idea of absolute simplicity.

When I looked a strange thing happened. Another hand of almost unnatural whiteness, with long, slim, colorless fingers, slowly loomed into shape, and deliberately turned the bracelet round on the arm. The effect was to hide that small knob, and to render the bracelet apparently exactly similar to the other two. When this was effectually done, the hand slowly disappeared, as though it had dissolved into the air.

There followed a space of time, the length of which I had no means of determining; then the bracelet slowly slipped round to its former position. It had scarcely become quite stationary before the hand loomed into sight again, and slowly turned it round so as to

hide the fastenings. This happened three times; then I awoke.

The whole of that day I remained in a sort of dazed state, pondering over this strange dream of mine. On the morrow a ray of light came to me. I rose early, after a long and dreamless night's rest, and, packing a small bag, announced my intention of taking a journey.

Of course my poor old mother protested loudly against the rashness and folly of my doing anything of the sort. I should be recognized, she said, and arrested at once; but I bade her remember what my appearance had been at the time when my description had been given to the police, and what it was now. My illness had done me one good service. None could possibly have recognized in the William Smith, as I called myself now, the Philip Neillson, valet to his late Lordship the Earl of Alceston, and suspected of his murder. The one had been tall, dark, and smooth-shaven; the William Smith of the present was a man apparently stricken in years, with bent frame, tottering footsteps, and snow-white hair and beard. Even my mother felt herself silenced when I reminded her of my changed appearance.

It took me two days to get down into Leicestershire On the close of the second I presented myself at Gorton Park and asked to see Lady Alceston.

I was told at first that it was impossible. She saw no one. But I sent my name up in a sealed letter, and the man came quickly back. Her ladyship would see me at once.

They led me through many rooms and along many passages to a small, darkened chamber. A gray-haired, sad-faced woman looked up strangely and eagerly at me from the depths of a low chair, and my heart, which had at first almost stood still, beat fast, and my eyes filled with tears. If I was changed, what was she? Where was her sunny brown hair and dazzling complexion and bewildering smile, which once had made her one of society's beauties? Gone, all gone! It was a trembling old woman who leaned forward toward me

in the twilight, with nothing save the queenly poise of her small head to remind me of the Lady Alceston of the past.

"Neillson? No, it cannot be! My God! how you are changed! or are you disguised?" she said, in a low, half-fearful whisper.

I shook my head. "Nature has disguised me, your ladyship," I said. "I have been ill."

"Come here, Neillson, and give me your hand. It does me good to see some one—who knows. My son has been here, and the agony in his eyes kills me. I had to send him away. Why have you come? You have a reason. Is it quite safe, do you think?"

I stroked my long beard and, standing in the firelight, pointed to my wrinkled face and deep-sunken eyes, and looked downward at my tottering limbs.

"I think that it is safe," I said. "Does not your ladyship think so?"

She looked at me with an infinite pity softening her haggard face, and the tears forcing themselves into her eyes.

"Yes. It is safe," she said. "But why have you come? You had a reason."

"Ay, I had a reason, your ladyship. I have had a strange vision."

"Ah!"

"Three times I have seen in the dead of night, before my closed eyes, one object. I have seen a bracelet upon the arm of a dead woman."

"My God!"

"Your ladyship, many years ago, when I was with—Lord Clanavon he was then—in France, he bought two gold bracelets. One he gave to the woman he married, one—he wore himself."

"I knew it," she moaned.

"You knew it!" I repeated eagerly. "Did you ever see it, my lady? Can you tell me what it is like?"

"Neillson," she said hoarsely, "it is strange that you should ask me this. Listen, and I will tell you something. Two days before the funeral I read an account

of that murder in the Bethnal Green Road. In the examination of the woman they found a plain gold bracelet, high up upon her right arm."

"Go on," I murmured; "go on!"

"Then I remembered that my lord was still wearing his; that it might be seen; that the coincidence might be ferreted out by some busybody. Who could tell what might happen? Strange things come to light nowadays, and truth is like cork held down beneath the waters, ever seeking to rise to the surface. A restless, haunting fear seized hold of me, and in the dead of night I stole to his room——"

"Yes! yes!"

"And I took the bracelet from off his arm."

"You have it now," I cried. "It is here."

"It is."

She rose slowly from her chair, and, with the aid of a stick, crossed the room and unlocked a cabinet. In a few minutes she returned, holding in her hand a gold bracelet.

I snatched it from her, and bent forward eagerly over the fire. The flames shone upon its dull, even surface, and I turned it quickly round. It was most certainly one of the two which I had seen long ago on my master's dressing-table. I knew it from the peculiarity of its perfectly plain contour without visible fastenings. It was one of those two bracelets, but the bracelet which I had seen in my dream was different.

I felt excited and restless, and I sat looking forward in my chair while wild, disconnected thoughts chased one another rapidly through my brain. My memory had not played me false, then! The bracelet on that dead arm was the fellow one to this. But what meant that strangest part of my vision, the deliberate turning round of the bracelet, as though to hide that sole difference between them? My brain whirled with conjectures; but through the maze decision came.

I looked up to find her ladyship watching me with a strange, awesome intentness. She asked no question

in words, but her look demanded an explanation. What could I say to her?

"My dream has all unsettled me," I said in a low tone. "May I keep this," and I touched it with my forefinger, "for a while?"

"Forever," she answered, with a shudder. "Take it away and let me see no more of it."

I rose, and stood before her as though to take my leave.

"You cannot go to-night," she said. "It is late. Why in such a hurry?"

I looked at my watch. The evening was far advanced. I could do nothing until to-morrow.

"They shall get you a room ready here," she said, "and some supper. Ring the bell."

I obeyed her, and she gave her orders. Then she dismissed me.

"What are you going to do with that?" she asked curiously, as I turned to go.

I hesitated. It was hard to explain. Yet I must say something.

"My dream," I muttered. "I want to verify a part of it. It haunts me."

She said no more, but glanced at me compassionately. She thought, doubtless, that trouble and illness had turned my brain. I said no more, but went. It was better for her to think so.

CHAPTER XI.

IN DANGER AT SCOTLAND YARD.

THE early train on the following morning conveyed me up to London, and in the afternoon, after having made a few changes in my attire, I did what many would doubtless have considered a foolhardy thing, but which, owing to the great change in my appearance, was tolerably safe. I, Philip Neillson, "wanted" by the police for the murder of a peer of the realm, presented myself at Scotland Yard, and after having read through in the

waiting-room a bill on which all particulars concerning me and my full description were set forth, was ushered into the presence of one of the superintendents.

Here I made a false calculation, which came very near upsetting all my plans. I presented myself as Richard Ashdale, a school-master from Beeton, near York, and explained to the inspector that in an old newspaper, which had only recently fallen into my hands, I had read the account of the murder of a woman in a street off Bethnal Green Road. I had had a niece in London, whom I had lost sight of since a little before that time, and I knew that she had always worn a bracelet above her elbow on her right arm, in the same place as the bracelet on the murdered woman. I had called to see whether they would allow me to inspect the bracelet with a view to identifying it as my niece's property.

The inspector listened to me in silence, and I noticed that the clerk sitting at a desk by his side wrote down in shorthand every word I said. I suppose it was all a matter of form, but it made me feel rather uneasy.

When I had finished I was asked to describe my niece, which, being now on my guard, I did without hesitation. She was fair, I said, with golden hair slightly streaked with gray, tall and very slim, but finely shaped, with dark eyes, and had lived like a lady. The inspector took down a ledger and appeared to compare my description with an entry there. Then he unlocked a drawer, and after a brief search handed me a bracelet.

My heart gave a great leap, but I struggled hard to hide my agitation. The bracelet I held in my hand was exactly similar to the one which her ladyship had given me, except in one particular—the fastening; and in that particular it was exactly similar to the one which I had seen in my dream.

I examined it carefully, and then handed it back to the inspector.

"I am very happy to see that this bracelet is not the one my niece wore," I said in a tone of forced relief. "It is far plainer and more massive."

The inspector looked at me steadily.

"You are quite sure of that, I suppose?" he asked. "It happens curiously enough that your description of your niece exactly tallies with the description of the murdered woman. That seems a strange coincidence."

I shook my head.

"At any rate, that bracelet was not the one she wore," I said, slowly rising to my feet. "I am sorry to have troubled you, though, of course, I am glad to have my mind set at ease."

"Naturally," he said. "Good-morning."

"Good-morning, sir."

I left the office with beating heart, glad to get safely away, and conscious that in more ways than one I had been imprudent. Immediately the door was closed I heard a sharp whistle behind me, which I concluded to come from the repeating tube in the inspector's room. On my way out I passed through the office with which it communicated, and one of the clerks was just letting fall the tube which he had been holding in his hands.

"Detective Harrison is wanted for immediate duty," he said, turning to a little knot of men close to the door. One of them, a tall, thin man, who had been lounging about listening to the conversation, immediately went to the counter.

"Where for instructions?" he asked nonchalantly.

"Superintendent Howe's room," the clerk answered.

The detective nodded, and strolled off. I passed through the door, and made my exit as quickly as possible. I was not exactly alarmed, but I was certainly disturbed. Superintendent Howe was the officer from whom I had just come.

Certain vague ideas had now assumed a tangible shape in my mind, and I was slowly developing some sort of a plan of action. After I left Scotland Yard, I walked for about an hour, thinking deeply, and quite unconscious of what direction I was taking. When I had come to a conclusion, I found myself in the Strand, close to Charing Cross Station, and stopped short, meaning to turn round and make my way back to Water-

loo. In doing so, I came face to face with a man carrying a small black bag, and walking as though in a great hurry. He did not glance at me, but I knew him. It was the detective told off for immediate service at Scotland Yard, and it flashed upon me in a moment that that immediate service was to watch me while they inquired into the truth of my story.

I made no sign of having recognized him, and slowly crossed the road, taking care to affect all the caution of a countryman. Then I went into the telegraph office and wrote out a telegram to Mr. Richard Ashdale, Beeton, near York.

"It is not Carrie. Am returning to-night."

Although it was life or death for me, I could not help admiring the unobtrusive way in which he kept close to me. He was at the counter when I handed my fictitious message, and, of course, read it. I waited for him outside, and when he was within hearing, addressed a clergyman who was passing.

"Could you inform me, sir," I asked, pulling off my hat, "where I could obtain a chop, or some slight refreshment of the sort, at a moderate cost?"

The clergyman stopped and considered.

"Are you pressed for time?" he asked.

I answered him that I was, and, as I had expected, he pointed to Gatti's restaurant.

"You had better go in there, then, I think," he said. "It is rather noisy, but cheap and close at hand."

I thanked him, and entered the swing doors. I had calculated, and correctly, that the detective would not follow me for a minute or two; so I had time to execute the stratagem which had occurred to me. I walked straight down the centre of the room and out of the opposite doors, called a hansom, and drove off to Waterloo. That night I was safe in Paris, without having seen anything more of Mr. Harrison.

CHAPTER XII.

A WOMAN AND A BRACELET.

It had seemed to me during those long, weary days when I lay hidden in Clanavon Castle that the quick throbbing of life and energy had died out forever from my pulse, and that I should never feel its beat again. But now a change had come over me. The faint glimmerings of hope which had shone in upon my dulled senses and brain had filled my whole being with the glow and energy of reawakened life. I dare not feed it with the fuel of anticipation, or the reaction of failure would most surely have killed me. I simply let my brain work, and obeyed its directions as well as I was able.

On the night of my arrival in Paris I stayed at a quiet middle-class hotel in the Rue de St. Pierre, and kept myself out of sight as much as possible. Early on the morrow I made my way to the Boulevards and presented myself at the establishment of Messrs. Rougut, the great jewellers.

My request to see one of the principals was presently complied with, and I found myself in a small glass office in one corner of the shop. Opposite to me was a young, smartly-dressed Parisian, who rose from a small marble table covered with diamonds, which he had been examining, and removing a cigarette from between his white teeth, asked me my business.

I told him that I wished to order a bracelet exactly similar to one which had been made at his establishment some long time ago. He bowed politely, and intimated his perfect willingness to accept the order.

"We always keep the designs," he remarked, "of every article of jewelry manufactured upon the premises. If you can give me the name and the date when the bracelet was purchased, I can turn up the design and show you—that is," he added, shrugging his shoulders, "provided we are under no obligation to furnish no more of the same pattern."

I brought out my pocket-book and consulted it.

"It is a very long time ago," I remarked, hesitatingly.

"That is of no consequence."

"On the 20th of May, 18—," I said, "you sent to Lord Clanavon, at the Leon d'Or Hotel, St. Marien, two bracelets. I don't know when he ordered them, but I know that that was about the date of their arrival."

He touched a small hand gong on the table before him, and turned toward me with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Just about the time of my appearance in the world," he remarked, "so it goes without saying that I do not remember the order. Mordau," he continued, turning round to the man who had answered the bell, "send Monsieur Ducate here."

The man bowed and withdrew. Directly afterward a tall, gray-haired old gentleman, with gold-rimmed eye-glasses, knocked at the door and entered.

"Ducate, I want the design ledger for 18—," Mons. Rougut said. "This gentleman wishes to order a bracelet similar to one supplied to—to what name, monsieur?"

"To Lord Clanavon."

"Ah, yes; to Lord Clanavon, some time during May of that year. Can you find the design?"

"Certainly, monsieur. In one moment."

He disappeared, and presently brought in a large brass-bound ledger, the stiff white pages of which were covered with various designs for jewelry, evidently traced and pasted in. The entry was found directly, and we all three stood up and looked at it.

"I remember it perfectly," Monsieur Ducate said, resting his long, slim forefinger upon the page. "The bracelets, as you see, are perfectly plain, and the clasp fastening is peculiar. It was a patent of our own, which I have often wondered did not take better. We have made scarcely another in the same way."

"May I ask," I said, "whether you have ever before had an inquiry for a similar bracelet?"

Monsieur Ducate tapped his forehead reflectively.

"I think—yes," he said. "If monsieur will pardon me one moment."

He left the office, and returned with a small diary in his hand.

"About a year ago," he said, "a lady, whose name we do not appear to have an entry of, called with a similar request to that which you are now making. We were quite willing to accept the commission, but we happened to be exceedingly busy at the time, and we could not promise that the bracelet should be ready by the time she stipulated. We had one in stock, however, exactly like it save in one respect—the fastening; and after a good deal of indecision she bought that one and took it away with her."

"Was this it?" I asked, producing the one which Lady Alceston had given me.

Monsieur Ducate took it and looked at it carefully.

"Certainly not, monsieur," he remarked, handing it back to me. "That is, without doubt, the identical bracelet which we made for Lord Clanavon."

"And can you point out to me," I said, "where this one differs from the bracelet which the lady you mentioned purchased?"

Monsieur Ducate laid the pointed edge of his white finger-nail in a certain spot of the bracelet.

"In appearance, monsieur," he said, "only that here there would be a small knob on the one of later make. This one, as you see, is quite plain."

"I suppose, sir," I said, "you could not give me any description of this lady. You don't remember anything about her appearance?"

He shook his head. "Very little, sir, I fear. She was dressed in black, I remember, and wore a rather thick veil. Her figure was good and her hair fair. The general impression she left upon me was that she was a good-looking woman. By the bye," he added, "she told me something by which you would be able to recognize her."

"Yes!"

"In her first inquiry for the bracelet she said that

she was the lady to whom Lord Clanavon had presented the one she desired copied."

"And did she say what had become of it?"

"She had lost it, or mislaid it in some way—I forget her exact explanation."

I thanked him, and he withdrew, carrying off the ledger with him. I could see that Monsieur Rougut was getting impatient.

"Well, have you found out what you want to know?" he asked.

I shook my head. "Not quite, but I have discovered as much as I expected to."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Your order for the bracelet was only an excuse, I suppose?" he remarked.

"Scarcely that," I replied. "I didn't expect to take up your time for nothing."

"Oh, it is nothing. You're quite welcome to the information we've been able to give you. Good-morning."

"Good-morning, sir," I said. Then I came away.

CHAPTER XIII.

LORD ALCESTON IS TEMPTED.

Now, at last, the climax has come! I have thrown my honor after my fortune and my name, and have lost all. Was it madness that came over me, I wonder? Ay, the madness of love. We were alone, and it seemed to me that she tempted the words out of my lips. Shall I ever forget the glowing beauty of her face as she leaned over toward me on the balcony, her eyes full of the soft witchery of sweet, involuntary invitation, and her lips trembling with the eagerness which she could not hide? I wonder if any one in my place could have looked thus into the face of the woman he loved and not have told her so. I think not. It seems to me impossible.

What does she think of me, I wonder! I have held her in my arms, my lips have sought hers and forced the

kisses from them. I have told her passionately, fiercely, that I loved her, and then suddenly, without a word of warning, I thrust her from me and fled like a madman into the darkness. I heard her faint, reproachful cry as I hurried over the lawn, but I dared not turn back. One look, and I should have been her slave again.

I am at war with Fortune indeed, and who shall say that she has used me fairly? Never since the days of my boyhood have I once seen anything in a woman's eyes to make my heart beat faster; never once have found my thoughts filled for a single moment with the memory of a woman's face. And now see what has happened! At the very moment when this avalanche of trouble has fallen upon my head, when more than ever it is my duty to be up and quit myself like a man, I find myself suddenly fallen a blind slave to a passion against which my frantic struggles are as impotent as though I had striven with my voice to stem the tide on that dark night in Clanavon Bay. What magic has she used that the slightest memory of those few moments of rapturous happiness should drive away from my memory every black thought and miserable recollection of my great grief?

Let me think coolly for a moment, if I can! Here am I, without a name, and without a single farthing which I can call my own, striving to win—nay, I have already won—the love of a girl who believes me to be a peer of England. She may love me for myself alone; something tells me that she does; but even if it be so, I have no right to her love. Nay, it is dishonor to me that I have told her of mine. . . .

What am I to do? Tell her the truth! Perhaps her father has done so already! I cannot! There is only one other alternative. I must go away; leave her without a word of farewell. Can I do this? I must! . . .

Her father has been here. When they showed him in I had but one thought. He had come in anger to upbraid me with seeking his daughter's love—and he was in the right. For the first time in my life I was

ashamed to look a man full in the face. I stood patiently before him, expecting to hear a stream of fierce, angry words, and determined that, whatever he might say, I would bear for her sake, and for the sake of my own guilt.

But there came no words from him of any sort, and presently I looked up surprised, half expecting to find him choking with rage. On the contrary, his agitation, for he was agitated, proceeded from quite a different cause.

"Lord Alceston," he commenced, "my daughter has told me something of what has passed between you."

"I am much to blame, Monsieur de Feurget," I answered. "You have cause to be very angry with me. I fear you will think that I have abused your hospitality."

"It does not seem so to me," he said quietly. "Nay, I am proud that my daughter should have won your regard. There is no man in the world whom I would rather see her husband."

"But you forget," I stammered, amazed.

"I forget nothing. Listen. It would be blind, mad folly of you to disclose what would profit none, and would disgrace you, disgrace your mother, and disgrace your father's memory. Bury it, as I will. We three alone in the world—your mother, yourself, and I—know of it. Let it die out from our remembrance. But in case anything should ever happen to bring it to light—which nothing ever can—I will settle the whole of my fortune on you—yourself absolutely—on the day you marry my daughter. Say—do you consent to this?"

The eagerness which shone in his face and which quivered in his tone was unmistakable. From what I had seen of Mons. de Feurget, I should have deemed him the last man in the world to be moved by vulgar ambition. Yet what motive could he have in urging me to marry his daughter? That he loved her I was sure, and yet by his offer he was exposing her to a dreadful risk.

"Supposing I consented to this," I said in a low tone, broken with agitation. "Should you tell her—all?"

"Not a word. What necessity would there be? I shall soon be dead. I feel that my days are numbered, and then, save yourself, no one would know."

"There have been strange instances of truth coming to light," I went on, half to myself. "There have been cases where, after many years, men have come from the dead——"

"There can be no such fear here," he interrupted. "You know that there cannot."

It was a moment of bitter temptation to me. As in a dream, there passed before me the sad, sorrowful face of my mother, nursing her fierce grief in dreary solitude. What would happen to her if I were to play the part of honest man and blazon out this hideous secret? Alas! I knew. Her proud heart would break. And then I saw Marie's face, softened with love and tenderness, and with the mute reproach shining out of her bright eyes. Was not her happiness, too, at stake? And, last of all, I looked into the future, and I saw myself homeless, nameless, wretched, a wanderer upon the face of the earth, with no hope in the future, and no joy in the present—a self-wrecked outcast, to whom death alone could bring release. It was a fearful prospect!

I sank down into a chair and covered my face with my hands. Soon he came and stood by my side, and began talking again in a low tone, nervous with eagerness, urging me to let him go back to Marie and tell her that all was well; begging me to go with him; pouring out a whole torrent of argument, little of which escaped my ears, for I was willing to hear and eager to be convinced. Yet even then, in that brief, agitated interview, it faintly dawned upon me that there was something strange, something beneath the surface, in the hysterical eagerness with which he piled argument upon argument in his frantic attempts to win me to his view of the case.

"Monsieur de Feurget," I said to him suddenly, in-

terrupting his stream of words, "do you think that as a father you are doing your duty to urge me like this?"

"Yes," he answered, almost fiercely. "Yes. If I were not as sure of the safety of what I am doing as I am of my own existence, you might have reason in asking that question. As it is, you have none. I seek my daughter's happiness. She loves you."

"And God knows that I love her," I cried bitterly. "Monsieur de Feurget, I can give you no answer to-day; no, nor to-morrow. In three days I will have made up my mind. Farewell now."

"In three days! Good!" he answered. "At the end of that time I shall expect to hear from you."

Then he went away, and I was left alone.

It was late when he departed—nearly midnight; but to attempt to get rest seemed like a mockery to me. My brain was in a whirl, and my mind in a state of chaos. But of all the thoughts that thronged in upon me, there was one which held its own always, and which seemed to throw a strange, sweet light upon all the others. She loved me. Was not that worth the world to me—worth far more than a quixotic scruple which would bring disgrace and misery on other heads than mine if I yielded to it?

I stood by the open window, and I heard the midnight silence broken by the sound of wheels without feeling the curiosity to glance below. There was the noise and bustle of some one being admitted to the hotel, and presently there was a knocking at my door, which was quietly opened and shut. I moved from the recess into the room, and stood face to face with the intruder.

At first I did not know him. I saw a tall, gaunt man with white beard and hair, with hollow cheeks and fevered eyes. When a moment later recognition did sweep in upon me, it brought with it an awed surprise.

"Neillson," I cried, "is that you?"

He was leaning upon the back of a chair, which his long, white fingers were grasping convulsively. His whole shrunken frame seemed quivering with agitation,

and his breathing came in quick, uneven gasps. He tried twice to speak before he could command words.

"The death certificate of—of Cecile Clanavon. Where—where is it?"

He held out his hand eagerly, but I shook my head.

"It was lost that night in the bay," I answered.

"Do you remember where it was dated from?"

I shook my head. I had never looked.

He sank down into the chair wringing his hands.

"All in vain!" he muttered. "In vain—in vain!"

I hurried to his side, but his eyes were closed, and a ghastly pallor crept into his face. He had fainted.

CHAPTER XIV.

FIRE AT THE CONVENT.

Every one who has passed through a period of great mental anguish will, at some time or other during it, have experienced the strong, impulsive desire to numb, if only for a very brief while, the acute agony by physical exhaustion. It swept in upon me with more than common force after Neillson's sudden arrival, and on the first day of the three for which I had bargained with Monsieur de Feurget. Nor was I long in yielding to it. Early in the morning I left the hotel, and setting my face inland I commenced to walk away from the fashionable little watering-place as though my one object in life was to get as far away from it as possible. By noon-time I must have travelled fifteen miles; and faint with heat and exhaustion and half choked with dust, I was glad to rest for a while in a way-side cottage and accept such timidly-proffered hospitality as its peasant occupants had to offer.

When I was cool I offered them a coin, which I had much trouble to persuade them to accept, and stepped out again into the broad white road.

Far away in front of me was a long line of dark hills, and after a moment's hesitation I set out toward them. The afternoon sun was blazing down upon me with a

pitiless heat, and my feet sank noiselessly into a thick carpet of white dust. More than once I felt my temples throb and my head swim with the burning heat, but I walked steadily on, heedless of the pain. After what I had been suffering, this was nothing.

As I approached the hills which I had vaguely fixed upon as my destination, their appearance became more inviting. Deep yellow cornfields were waving upon their slopes, empurpled with vineyards and plantations of broad-leafed, deep-greened trees, which seemed to my fevered limbs sweetly suggestive of coolness and shade. I could see no houses save one, a long, white building of irregular shape, half hidden by the trees which surrounded it. By its side was an older building, which I judged to be a chapel, and soon I was sure of it, for when, at last, I had reached the summit of the first of the hills, and had thrown myself down under the shade of a little knoll of rosy budded lime-trees, I heard the soft chiming of a bell, and almost immediately afterward a little procession of plainly-robed women passed two and two from the house into the chapel. Then the bell ceased and there was silence again.

I drew a long sigh of contentment and stretched my tired limbs out upon the smooth turf. In some measure I had found what I had sought—peace. At my feet was the half-ruined old chapel, with its weather-beaten cross standing out vividly against the evening sky; and presently, from the open doors, there stole out the faint, sweet sound of women's voices chanting the Agnus Dei. It died away, and there was silence. Then more distinctly there floated up the strains of the evensong at the close of the service. I raised myself on my elbow to listen, and when at last it ceased I remained watching the dark figures issue slowly from the chapel, and, after a little hesitation and sauntering, as though to breathe in some of the sweetness of the evening, reenter the house. When the last one had gone, I leaned back again, but I still felt no inclination to move. The spot where I was had a charm for me.

Slowly the brilliant streaks of color faded away, and

the shades of twilight commenced to fall. A slight dampness hung about in the air, and below in the valley, and about the sides of the hills, white clouds of mist were slowly gathering. It was time for me to rise and go.

Slowly I staggered up to my feet and stretched my tired limbs. I gazed steadfastly for a minute or two at the rugged cross, which was so placed that from where I was it stood always out in bold relief aganst the clear sky, and my thoughts dwelt for more than a minute on the little community of simple-minded, zealous women who had preferred the safety of seclusion, and the life of contemplation and reverence, to the thousand joys of the outside world. Then I glanced from the chapel to their abode, and my eyes, which had sought it carelessly enough, became suddenly fixed, and I felt my heart beat fast. What was that brilliant glow of red light in one of the high, painted windows? It might have been the last fierce glow of a summer sunset; but the sun had set long ago. No moon, no lamp, could give such a light. I watched it for a second, and then I gave a wild cry and leaped forward, with all memory of my weariness gone; for out of the window and up into the dark sky had shot a long forked flame, followed by a cloud of smoke. It was fire!

CHAPTER XV.

A DESPERATE CLIMB.

In my college days I won more than one cup for cross-country running and hurdle-jumping, but I am very sure that I beat every previous record in my wild descent toward the burning house. The hedges that I could not clear I leaped through, and my feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground as I tore down the hill. But, notwithstanding my haste, long before I reached my destination the silent night was made hideous by the shriek of terrified women—some flying from the house, some standing helplessly at the window, wringing their hands and dazed with fear. It was an awful

scene. The fire was on the second story, where, apparently, the sisters had been seated at their evening meal. Some had promptly rushed downstairs, and had got clear of the house altogether; others, slower or more timid, had delayed until the staircase had caught fire and it was too late. There they stood at the window, shrieking and convulsed with fear, some kneeling, some rushing wildly backward and forward seeking other means of escape, and behind them the dull red glow of the fast-approaching flames. I reached the shrubbery and bounded across the lawn. On the walk, his white hair streaming in the wind and the tears of impotent pity streaming down his face, was the old chaplain. I caught him by the shoulder and shook him in my excitement.

"Is there no ladder?" I cried in French.

"Ah, the ladder!" he exclaimed. "In the tool-house. This way! this way!"

I hurried on before him to the shed. Leaning against it was a ladder of moderate length. With beating heart I reared it against the wall. Alas! it was fully a yard too short! A little cry of disappointment burst from the lips of the trembling little group.

"Courage," I cried, "courage! Stand away from the window! I am coming to you!

There was a breathless silence. I ran up the ladder swiftly, and, poising myself for a moment on the topmost rung, stooped down and leaped through the window into the room.

There was no time to lose, for the far wall of the long apartment was already in flames and the smoke and heat were stifling. I lifted the nearest of the little crowd of women by the arms and held her suspended out of the window until her feet touched the ladder. Then, hanging out of the casement, I gave her my hand until she had fairly commenced the descent, and directly she was out of my reach I turned for the next.

One by one they were saved. Their behavior made a deep impression upon me. There was no struggling—no desire to push one in front of the other. They took

their turn quietly, praying on their knees until it came, with half-closed eyes and calm faces lit up by the lurid flames which every moment drew nearer to them. The last was a slight child, who felt like a baby in my arms, and as she was stunned and dazed by the smoke and heat, I wrapped her arms around my neck and descended with her.

It was a strange sight on the lawn. Many of the people from the neighborhood had arrived, but there was no fire engine nor any chance of any, and nothing could be done to quell the flames. There they all stood in little groups, the women, now that the danger was over, weeping and terrified at their strange position and the loss of their home. Suddenly there was a hush, followed by a deep, agitated murmur. Then one of the women suddenly caught hold of my arm and with the other pointed to the window of the room which they had just quitted.

"Sister Agnes!" she cried. "Mother of Jesus, save her!"

There was a moment's silence, and then a succession of piercing, heart-breaking screams from the frenzied women. Every eye was riveted upon the window, my own included, and a thrill of horror passed through me. Standing perfectly still, her calm, sweet face, with its coils of gray hair, brilliantly illuminated by the rolling flames which were fast creeping toward her, was a tall, stately-looking woman, with her arms and face stretched up toward Heaven as though in silent prayer.

They crowded around me, weeping, wringing their hands, and pouring out passionate appeals. They went on their knees, crying to me to save her, and like a flash I felt all the weariness and stiffness pass away from my limbs. I rushed toward the window, hastily reared the ladder, and ran up it. But, quick though I was, I was too late. When I stood on the topmost rung the flames leaped out, scorching my face and hair, and through the clouds of smoke I could see that the room was empty. I tried to leap through the casement, but the belching flames and thick volumes of smoke drove

me back, dazed. Nevertheless, I should have tried again but for another cry below. I stole a quick glance downward. The lawn was studded with the kneeling figures of the sisters. Their eyes seemed turned all in one direction above my head. I descended swiftly, drew the ladder away from its dangerous position, and stood with them.

I looked upward, and a cry burst from my lips. By some means she had reached the roof, and was standing there with one arm embracing the rugged stone cross and with the other stretched out toward us in an attitude of farewell. There was no fear, no shrinking, no signs of dread at the hideous fate which seemed about to enfold her. Nothing but perfect peace, perfect contentment. I felt a fierce resolve leap up within me, and my body seemed filled with fresh vigor and energy. Stand by and see her die I could not. But how to save her?

I strode up to the huddled group of weeping women, and called sternly out to them.

"I want a coil of rope," I said, speaking rapidly to the chaplain, who was standing by my side. "I saw one in the tool-shed."

He hurried away and brought it to me. I tied one end round my body and made a slip-knot at the other. Then I reared the ladder against the extreme end of the blazing building and mounted it to the topmost rung.

When I reached it I found myself still twenty feet from the roof. Turning round, I pulled up the rope; then, holding the slip-knot in my hand, I called out to the woman above.

With a lingering reluctance, which made me quiver with impatience, she unlinked her arm from the cross and advanced to the edge of the roof. I stood up, holding the slip-knot in my hand, but when I sought to throw it to her and to speak, my tongue and arm alike seemed paralyzed. I forgot the ravenous flames which were roaring on toward us, blistering the skin upon my face and hands and bathing us both in a warm, rosy glow. I looked into her sad, calm face, full of a

strange beauty, and I forgot all there. The face looking into mine was that of the woman whose photograph I had found in the keep at Clanavon Castle!

Dizzy with the great shock, I reeled and almost fell. She saw it, and leaned over the stone parapet silent, but horrified. I recovered myself with a desperate effort, and our eyes met. Then I knew that she, too, recognized the likeness to a familiar face.

I threw the slip-knot up, and it fell on the roof; but she made no motion to take it, nor did she remove her eyes from my face.

"Take it," I cried, "quick!"

She did not move. I cried to her again more imperatively than before.

"Take it and fasten it to the cross."

Still she did not speak or withdraw her wild, rapt gaze from my face. I loosened my hand and hung backward suspended in mid-air.

"Do as I tell you, or I will fall!" I cried. "I am here to save you. A moment's delay and we shall perish."

She started backward when she saw my peril, and did as I had bade her.

"Is it firm?" I cried.

"Leave me here!" she cried. "I wish to die."

For answer I let my feet quit the ladder and hung suspended by the rope. Hand over hand I pulled myself up until I stood at last by her side.

We stood side by side, struggling and gasping for breath in the heated atmosphere. In her face there was still that look of awed wonder, but it had softened now, and the horror had died away from it.

"Who are you?" she whispered. "Tell me——"

"I have come to save you, Sister Agnes!" I cried. "Quick!"

I undid the rope from my own body and wound it around hers. She sought to stop me, but I pushed her hands away.

"I would rather die," she answered. "Leave me here and save yourself. But tell me, first, who you are."

"I am Lord Alceston now," I answered, drawing her to the parapet, "but if you keep me here a moment longer I must bid my name good-by forever."

I tightened the rope and let her down slowly from the parapet. Then I, too, climbed over the edge and let myself down.

It was well that I was close behind her, for after a few trembling steps she reeled and would have fallen. At the foot of the ladder a hundred eager hands met us, and a great sobbing cry of joy and relief broke the intense stillness which had reigned among the watchers. I felt soft arms around my neck, and hot tears and kisses upon my hands as they crowded around us. But suddenly it all died away—the sound of their hysterical, shaking voices and the sight of their pale, eager, tear-stained faces radiant with gratitude. Consciousness had left me like a flash, and the unnatural strength which had buoyed me up was gone. I had fainted like a woman.

CHAPTER XVI.

SISTER AGNES.

In this state I must have remained for many hours, for when I opened my eyes another sun was low down in the western sky. I was in a plain, bare bedchamber, with whitewashed walls and scantily furnished. The bed on which I was lying, however, was spotlessly clean, and by my side was a great bowl of sweet-smelling country flowers. Like a flash, the recollection of the previous night came to me—the fire, the perilous climbing, and the face of the woman whom they had called Sister Agnes.

I tried to jump out of bed, and made the discovery that my limbs were still stiff and sore, and that there were poultices on various parts of my body.

I lay down again and closed my eyes. Scarcely had I done so when the door of the room was carefully

opened and footsteps crossed the room to my side. There was a little hesitation, then a soft, white hand passed over my forehead with a gentle, caressing touch, lingering there for a moment or two and repeating the action. Presently I heard something which sounded like a stifled sob, and, slowly opening my eyes, I saw the bowed figure of a black-robed sister kneeling by my bedside. I started; she raised her head, and I looked into the face of Sister Agnes.

She rose at once and stood by my bedside. All trace of emotion had vanished as if by magic from her white, passionless face.

"You are better, my son?" she asked.

"If I have been ill, yes," I answered. "I feel a little stiff and sore, that is all. I have slept long?"

"All day, and sorely you must have needed it," she said. "My son, there are many helpless women who owe you their lives, I among them."

"You were not very anxious to be saved," I remarked.

"I was ready to die or to live, as was God's will," she answered. "Nay, I think that I am glad to have been spared, for those whom I have loved and watched over need me now in their distress more than ever. Yes, I am glad to be alive, and I thank you, my son."

"Sister Agnes," I said, "your face is one which I have seen before."

"Never," she answered calmly.

"Nay, but I have seen its picture," I continued. "You have not always been known as Sister Agnes."

"My other self is dead," she answered.

"Dead it may be in one sense," I answered; "but still it is alive. Sister Agnes, if ever you were known as Cecile d'Augerville tell me so quickly! It is more to me than you can imagine."

"That was my name," she answered quietly.

"Then why did you lead my father to suppose you dead, and let him marry again? Cannot you see the wrong you have done, Sister Agnes? I am the son of Lord Alceston, but I have no right now to his name.

The fault is yours, and on your head lies the blame of my infamy," I added bitterly.

"Ah!" She pressed her hand to her cold temples, and the saint-like calm died out of her face. She was agitated, but not as I had expected to see her.

"Your father—is he alive?" she asked.

"He is dead," I answered, steeling my heart against her, and vowing to myself that I would not spare her; and then, like a flash, I remembered how this strange discovery upset every theory of his death. Who now was the woman whom he had gone to visit secretly? Where was now the motive of his self-destruction? Gone! The whole theory was destroyed. Once more everything was in a hopeless maze.

"Dead! Dead! Ah me! Dead!"

The words seemed to glide out of her lips almost unconsciously. I looked at her, wondering, and my wonder had something of reverence in it. Was this the face of an erring, sinful woman, a woman to scheme and plan for an earthly vengeance? It seemed—nay, I knew that it was—impossible, and the harsh words which I would have uttered died away upon my lips.

In their place came a sort of awe, largely mingled with pity. I knew that I was looking upon a woman who had fulfilled very nearly, if not altogether, the ideal of her order. Asceticism, unselfishness, devotion had been the steps of the ladder by which she had attained to a spirituality so marked and evident that it seemed diffused from her very person, and gave her a strange, sweet influence over her fellow-creatures—an influence which I, too, felt.

Soon she came softly to my bedside and sank down upon her knees. Then, with her face turned at first a little away from me, she commenced to speak in a low, sweet tone, full of deep humility. Before she had uttered many words her hand sought mine, and my fingers had clasped it. If this woman had done me any wrong she was already forgiven. I was powerless even to feel resentment.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHO WAS THE WOMAN?

"My son," she said softly, "it is a strange fate which has brought you hither to me. I had thought that never in this world should I have to reopen the sealed chapters of my life, and to think and speak of that time when I was one of the outside world, a lover of its pleasures, and, alas! a very guilty woman. Year after year the memory of that time has grown fainter and fainter. Earthly love has almost died away from within me, and I can look into your face almost without emotion, though it reminds me so much of his.

"I loved your father, my son—loved him as women still love men, I suppose, in the world from which I have passed forever. He loved me, too; but I was never worthy of his love. He knew nothing of it; but I was not what he thought me.

"It was at St. Marien, near here, where we were living—my father, my sister, and I—that I first knew him. He was young and handsome and noble, and from the first moment when he began to whisper words of love to me he hinted at marriage, and when he spoke openly and told me of his love he asked me boldly to become his wife. He never knew why I hesitated so long. He never knew why I lay awake night after night filled with bitter regrets, wondering whether I dare marry him, tempted of the devil to do so, yet fearful. In the end the temptation was too strong, and I yielded. I kept a hideous secret locked in my heart, and stood by his side at the altar while the priest joined our hands and called us man and wife. Yes, I was married to your father."

She had told me so before, and yet somehow I had clung to some faint hope, which her words destroyed. I felt my heart sink, and I would have withdrawn my hand from hers. But she held my fingers tightly.

"Nay, but listen, my son," she continued. "I say that I was married to him; and yet it was no marriage."

"No marriage! What do you mean?" I cried. "I have seen a copy of the certificate."

"And so you may again, my son," she said, bowing her head. "And yet it was no marriage, for I was already married."

I felt quite powerless to say anything.

"You wonder that I can tell you of my shame like this," she said softly. "Ah, my son, for twenty years and more I have done unceasing penance, and the old life, with its sins and guilt, has passed away from me. Our Blessed Mother has heard my prayers, and Sister Agnes can talk calmly of Cecile d'Augerville's sins. Let me go on with my story.

"At least I have one excuse for what I did. I believed my husband dead. We had been married secretly, almost directly I had left the convent; but he was a soldier and had been obliged to leave me immediately after our marriage. I was only a girl, scarcely seventeen years old, when I married him, and the romantic fancy which I had thought love soon passed away. I had never dared tell my father, for he was poor, and I knew that his great hope was that Marie and I would marry rich husbands. So I left it until he should return from the war; and he did not return. Instead, there came rumors of his death, and, foolishly, I accepted them unquestioningly. Then your father came, and for the first time I knew what love was. When he asked me to marry him I consented, telling him nothing of my past lest he should give me up, and trusting implicitly to the vague rumors which had reached me of my husband's death. We were married secretly, and the vengeance of Heaven was swift. In less than a week your father killed mine in a duel, and I had received a message from my first husband, who was still alive and desired me to join him.

"I fled from home on that awful night, intending to end my days by my own hand. From such a crime, however, I was spared. I passed through a sweet country town, and some wild impulse led me to enter the cathedral. For the first time religion became a reality

to me. I confessed, and after much penance I was admitted a sister of the lowest order at the house, which is now, alas! no more. Step by step I worked myself up until at the death of the Superioress they chose me to take her place. From the moment of my entrance here I determined to write myself down as dead to the world. I sent a certificate of my death to your father, and to my friends. I aimed at entire and absolute detachment from every thought and affection of earthly origin. What strange providence has brought you here to make me reopen for the last time my other life I cannot tell. Yet it has come to pass, and I have told you all. Now I must go. But before I go accept my blessing. We shall all pray for you often, for many owe you their lives. Farewell."

"One word!" I cried. "Sister Agnes—I will forget that you ever had another name—I must ask you a question."

"Ask it, then."

"When my father lay dead there was found upon his arm a gold bracelet."

"And when I die," she said, "there will be found one upon my arm. I have told you my story from the very worst point of view, seeking to extenuate nothing. But I had what seemed to me then to be some excuse for my wicked deceit. I loved your father with a passionate, overwhelming love, and though I never think of that time now, that bracelet will never leave my arm. See!"

She raised her long sleeve, and I saw the dull band of gold.

"There has been a foul plot!" I cried. "Listen for one minute, Sister Agnes, while I tell you of my father's death."

She sat down upon the bed and folded her hands.

"He was a brave, good man, your father," she said softly. "If he is dead he is happy, even though he was not of our Church."

"Let me tell you of his death!" I cried, with a shudder. "Late one night, while he was receiving his

guests, a note was brought to him. He made some excuse and hurried away from his house to a lodging-place at the east end of London. There we know that he visited a woman who must have had some strong claim upon him. He returned to his guests, fulfilled all his duties, and on their departure, he went to his study. On the morrow he was found there—dead!"

"It was very sudden," she said. "Let us pray that he had made his peace with God."

"Ay, it was sudden," I continued; "but I have not told you all. He died no natural death."

"No natural death?" she repeated wonderingly. "He did not destroy himself?"

"Either that or he was murdered," I answered; "and God alone knows which. But listen. On that same morning the woman whom he had visited was found murdered!"

"Holy Mother!" she whispered, shuddering.

"The only clew we had to the mystery was this," I added, leaning toward her. "On the right arm of the murdered woman was found a gold bracelet, and on his was also one like it."

Again she was a woman, her gray eyes full of mingled horror and bewilderment and her cheeks blanched.

"It seemed to me that it was my place to solve this mystery," I continued. "I commenced my task by searching through my father's private papers, and from them I learned of his marriage to you. From Neillson, my father's servant, I learned of the bracelets which you and he wore. Can you wonder what everything seemed to lead to? My mother, Neillson, and myself, at separate times, and by different courses, arrived at the same conclusion. We decided that the woman at whose summons he had left his guests and gone at a moment's notice in the dead of night to the slums of London must be his lawful wife come back from the dead. Of her death, after his visit, and of his that same night, not one of us dared to think. And yet it has haunted me, has haunted all of us day and night

since that awful discovery. My mother is dying of a broken heart; Neillson is almost a madman; and I am a wanderer on the face of the earth, and now either I am dreaming or our agony has been in vain. My God! I think I am going mad! Sister Agnes, if you are the woman whom he thought his wife, who was she who was murdered in London, with the bracelet upon her arm, and what was she to my father? If you cannot tell me I shall go mad!"

She stood up on the floor with her hands pressed to her temples and her eyes full of a terrible light, swaying herself gently backward and forward. Then with a cry, awful beyond all expression, she sank down upon the ground a lifeless heap.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A JOURNEY.

I SPRANG from my couch and hastened to her side. I hurried on my clothes and cried aloud for help. The farmer's wife, who was our temporary hostess, came clattering upstairs in her huge sabots, and after her came one of the other sisters.

"Sister Agnes has fainted," I explained, as they opened the door. "What can we do for her? Have you brandy?"

They hastened to her side, and applied many restoratives, of which I knew nothing, but for a long time without effect.

"I must fetch a doctor!" I cried. "Where can I find one?"

The sister took out her watch.

"Dr. Leneuill will be here in a few minutes to see you, monsieur," she remarked. "Better wait for him. Will monsieur lift her on to the bed?"

I did so, and by and by the signs of life began slowly to reappear. The sister looked at me doubtfully.

"Monsieur will pardon me," she said, "but if our dear sister's sudden illness had anything to do with him,

would it not be better for him to retire for a while, that she may not see him when she first opens her eyes? If monsieur does not mind?"

I turned away and left the room.

After a while our hostess came down with the news that Sister Agnes had recovered and was asking for me.

I went upstairs at once, and when I stood by her side, I was shocked to see the change which a few hours had made in her appearance. She beckoned me close to her side.

"Ask me no questions," she said hoarsely, grasping my coat-sleeve with her thin, nervous fingers. "Ask me no questions, but get ready to go a journey with me to-morrow. You will?"

"I will, Sister Agnes," I answered softly. "Wherever you choose to take me."

CHAPTER XIX.

M. DE FEURGET DESIRES A SON-IN-LAW.

THREE days—three long, dreary days—and no news of Bernard. He has not been to see me, he has not even sent a message. What can it mean—this silence? Were those few minutes on the balcony only a sweet dream, a vision, a freak of the imagination? How idle to ask it! Are not my lips still burning with the fire of that long kiss, and are not his passionate words still ringing in my ears? I cannot even think of him without feeling again some faint remembrance of that exquisite thrill of happiness which passed through me like lightning when I knew that he loved me and I felt myself clasped for one short moment in his arms.

Something must have happened to him! I know it. He would never leave me like this without a word or a message after what has passed between us.

Our little household is quite disorganized. Not only am I in a state of mind bordering upon distraction, but there is something more than usually strange about my

father's behavior, also. Strange to say, too, his disquietude seems to proceed from the same cause as mine—Lord Alceston's disappearance. I am more than convinced that the secret trouble—which seems to be wearing out his life, and of which I dare not speak to him—is in some way connected with Bernard's appearance here. I know that he has been going down to the hotel where Bernard stayed, continually trying to find him; but, alas! he has never succeeded! What does he want with him? He can know nothing yet. . . .

My father has just returned from another fruitless visit to the hotel, and he has brought with him an old man, a servant of Lord Alceston, who has just come from England to him. They went straight into the library, and were talking together for a long time. Then I went down to see if there was any news, for I could bear the suspense no longer. He has no news; he can tell us nothing. It seems Bernard left the hotel suddenly, without saying where he was going, three days ago. . . .

Mr. Carlyon called yesterday, and as he saw me at the window and came straight in I was compelled to see him, though I could scarcely keep still for nervousness. He knows no more than any of us what has become of his cousin.

"Bernard's all right," he declared. "He knows how to take care of himself; and, besides, he's awfully fond of these mysterious disappearances. Goes in for them regularly, you know, when he's bored, and saves all the bother of saying good-by."

Was he bored here, I wonder? I think not. I had a great mind to tell Mr. Carlyon, but he looked so moody and different from his usual self that I scarcely liked to. And then, perhaps, Bernard would not have liked it. . . .

My father knows everything. I could not help telling him. He came in softly when I was—in tears, I am afraid; and he asked me so kindly and yet so eagerly that I could keep it to myself no longer.

When I had told him I felt better. For a long time

he made no remark; it seemed almost as if my story had fallen upon deaf ears. But I knew that it was not so. "*Mon père*, you are not angry?" I said after a while. "This does not displease you?"

"Angry!" He stopped opposite my chair, and his voice was shaking with feverish emotion. "Marie, nothing else in the world would be so welcome to me as this. Nothing else could bring me so much peace. God grant that it may come to pass!"

I looked at him wonderingly. It was a rare thing to see him so much moved. What could it mean?

"Are you so anxious, then, to get rid of me, *mon père?*" I asked falteringly.

"It is not that, child!" he cried, with a sudden vigor in his tone. "I owe Lord Alceston a debt which I can never pay. I have sinned against him, and my hand cannot undo what it has done. Through you alone can I make reparation. Remember this, and if he comes for you, be a good wife to him all your life, and your father will bless you."

"Does he know of this debt?" I asked.

"Not now; but he will know. When I die he will know, and that will be soon—very soon."

He turned away and left me without another word. . . .

In about an hour's time he sent for me again into the library. I went hurriedly, hoping to hear news of Bernard. But he never even mentioned his name, nor did he refer to his strange words to me in our recent conversation. He commenced talking calmly about something else.

"You remember what I told you about M. d'Aubron and Mr. Carlyon on the night of their first visit here?" he said.

I nodded assent.

"About M. d'Aubron playing cards so much, and being a bad companion for Mr. Carlyon?"

"Yes. Well, I find that I was right. Things have turned out very much as I expected. Carlyon has been led on by D'Aubron to play cards night after night,

giving I. O. U.s always in payment—for, of course, poor Carlyon always lost after the first night or two. Now the crisis has come. M. d'Aubron has dropped some pretty plain hints that he would like some of the I. O. U.s taken up, and Carlyon, who has already considerably exceeded his allowance, is almost beside himself. I heard about it at the Casino reading-room this morning, and I went to see Carlyon at once."

"What has Mr. Brown been doing?" I asked. "He is supposed to be looking after Mr. Carlyon, is he not?"

"That is one of the worst features of the whole matter. Mr. Brown himself has been led on to play by that artful scoundrel, and he himself is deeply involved. In fact, both he and Carlyon are ruined unless something can be done."

I remember how pale and *distrait* Arthur Carlyon had seemed, and I felt a moment's remorse for the selfishness of my own grief.

"Can nothing be done?" I asked. "That D'Aubron ought to be punished."

"There is just one hope," my father continued thoughtfully. "I remember many years ago a somewhat similar case, of which I was a witness, and which has given me an idea with regard to Carlyon's trouble."

"Do you think that M. d'Aubron has played fairly?" I asked.

My father looked doubtful.

"I cannot say; but I am going to try and find out."

"How?"

"They are both coming here this evening, and after I had asked D'Aubron I said that I feared he had found it dull on his previous visit, and told him that if he cared to bring a pack of cards up with him we might have a quiet hand of whist. He fell in with it at once, and I have no doubt that he will do so. I shall watch the game closely, and, of course, if I see the slightest sign of unfair play I shall know how to act."

"Does Mr. Carlyon know?"

"Yes, of course I told him. A most unsuspecting boy he is! D'Aubron has made a complete fool of

him. When I suggested this thing at first, he was quite indignant. Even now that he has consented to it, he laughs at the idea of there being any unfairness in D'Aubron's play. But we shall see." . . .

M. d'Aubron, Mr. Carlyon, and Mr. Brown have arrived together. I have pleaded indisposition, and have seen nothing of them. I could not bear it.

They have finished dinner, and I can hear their voices in the library. How loudly they are all talking, even my father, and his voice is usually so low. Now they are quieter. I suppose that they have begun to play cards.

I am going to my room to try and sleep. I am afraid that it will be no use, for my temples are burning and my brain seems on fire. Will he come to-night, I wonder? Good-night, Bernard, my love, good-night! If I may not call you by your name I can at least write it! Good-night, my love!

CHAPTER XX.

NEILLSON IS SUSPICIOUS.

Mystery seems only to lead on to mystery. I am in a hopeless maze, groping about in vain for a clew. I have discovered strange things, but they are like an unpieced puzzle in my hands. I cannot put them together. I cannot see to what they lead.

Who was the woman who ordered that bracelet at M. Rouzet's, in Paris? What was her object? And how did she know where the former ones had been made? I can see only one step before me—to verify the death certificate of Mlle. Cecile. True, she herself has confessed it to be forged; still it would be a satisfaction to discover by what means she obtained it.

On leaving Paris I came straight here in search of my master, not doubting but that he had with him the certificate. How changed I must be! At first he did

not know me. Can I wonder at it when I look in the glass and see my wrinkled face and snow-white hair?

The sudden shock of seeing my poor young master again so much altered, and the disappointment of hearing that the certificate was irretrievably lost, made me feel dizzy and faint for a while. When I came to myself he had gone, and left only a hastily scrawled line or two for me, saying that he would be away no longer than three days and that I was to wait here for him.

A strange thing has happened. A visitor has just called to see my master, and has been referred to me. I was walking up and down the room when he entered. I looked up and saw M. de Feurget!

"Neillson!" he exclaimed in a low, disturbed tone. "You here, and with Lord Alceston?"

"Yes, monsieur," I answered simply.

"I—I thought——"

"You thought that I was in hiding," I interrupted.

"Yes. Has any one else been accused? I understood that there was a warrant."

"There was. There is now, I suppose. But I have convinced my master of my innocence, and I am not afraid of capture. You will not betray me?"

"Of course not; of course I shall not. It is no business of mine."

I gather from M. de Feurget's appearance that he has grown old before his time and that he is in ill-health. He is evidently very nervous, for this sudden meeting with me seems to have upset him completely. He looks at me in a strange, dazed sort of way, as though he were afraid of me, and I can see his limbs shaking. Why should my presence have such an effect upon him?

He stayed for more than an hour, talking aimlessly and looking often toward the door as though he hoped my master would come. When he rose to go he professed to take pity upon my loneliness and ill-health and offered to take me with him to his home. I was on the point of refusing when I changed my mind. I did not understand M. de Feurget's agitation at seeing me, or

his anxiety to see my master. Recent events have made me suspicious. What I do not understand I suspect. I decided to go with M. de Feurget.

When we arrived at M. de Feurget's villa I had a shock. It was the old home of M. d'Augerville and his daughters, which, alas! I had known so well.

There was another surprise for me. We met his daughter in the garden, and when I saw her I had to stop and gasp for breath. She was so like Mlle. Cecile that at first I thought that it was all a dream—a nightmare. But it was no dream, and when she smiled I saw that this young lady was sweeter-looking even than Mlle. Cecile—more English-like. Then it all came to me like a flash. I remembered that M. de Feurget had been engaged to marry Mlle. Cecile's sister Marie. I asked after her, and he answered me strangely, almost roughly. She was dead, he said. I dare say that it was not a very happy marriage. Once or twice it occurred to me in those days that she seemed to care more for my master than for this man. Perhaps it was so. It was not a happy marriage. He looks as though he had known nothing but trouble all his life.

His interest in my master is strange. He asked me many questions about him, curious questions, too, and he has tried to get me to talk about that night; but I cannot.

M. de Feurget's manner seemed to me to grow more and more mysterious. He was like a man with a secret—as though he had some fierce trouble hanging always over him. There is another thing which perplexes me. He keeps recurring to that awful subject, although I beg him not to talk of it. It seems to possess a sort of morbid fascination for him. It is very strange.

Toward evening some gentlemen arrived, dressed for dinner, and my host had to leave me for a time. While he was engaged with them I slipped quietly away and hurried down to the hotel to inquire about my master. He had not returned, nor had anything been heard of him. I had made up my mind that as M. de Feurget

had guests I would stay at the hotel and not return to the villa that night. But when I tried to settle down there I found it impossible. I was restless and ill at ease. Some vague instinct—a sense that something was happening there—kept my thoughts fixed upon M. de Feurget and the villa upon the cliffs. Constantly I felt urged to return at once, and at last I yielded. I slipped quietly out of the hotel, for it was late—past midnight—and made my way up the winding path bordered with rhododendrons to the villa.

CHAPTER XXI.

M. D'AUBRON AT BAY.

I ENTERED the grounds of M. de Feurget's villa by a small private gate which had been left, by some chance, unopened. The greater part of the house seemed wrapped in darkness, but the light was streaming out from the room on the ground-floor which M. de Feurget had shown me as his library, and the French windows were standing half open.

To act the spy seems a mean part, but the end which I had in view was of sufficient magnitude to obscure all such considerations. I could have given no real reason why I connected M. de Feurget in my mind with that end, but somehow his mysterious manner and mode of questioning me had filled me with vague suspicion.

I crossed the lawn softly and took up a position behind a shrub, from which I could see into the room. There were four men there—M. de Feurget himself, Mr. Carlyon and his tutor, Mr. Brown—seated round a table; but just as I arrived they all rose, leaving several packs of cards scattered carelessly about all over it. To judge from their faces something had happened. There was the young English gentleman, Mr. Carlyon, sitting apart with his hands in his pockets, and a very ill-assumed look of indifference on his white face. There was the older gentleman making no effort at all

to conceal his dismay, M. d'Aubron leisurely smoking a cigarette and looking quite cool, but a little exultant; and, lastly, there was M. de Feurget sitting by himself a little apart, with a curious look upon his face which I could not quite understand. He was the first to break a silence which seemed as though it had been a somewhat prolonged one, and by his manner I guessed that something was going to happen.

I saw M. de Feurget throw away a cigarette and advance to the table.

"Any one interested in card tricks?" he asked quietly.

"D—n card tricks!" muttered young Mr. Carlyon savagely. "I beg your pardon, M. de Feurget," he added, looking a little ashamed of himself. "I didn't mean to be rude; but it was rather an unfortunate question, wasn't it?"

No one else had taken any notice of the question. M. de Feurget nodded sympathetically to Mr. Carlyon, and then drawing his chair close to the table, he leaned over it and collected a pack of cards in his hands. M. d'Aubron looked at him curiously, and I thought seemed a little disturbed.

"Gentlemen," he said suddenly, in an altered tone—so altered, indeed, that every one looked at him immepiately—"will you kindly give me your attention for a minute or two?"

Every one's eyes were riveted upon him. M. d'Aubron, who was sitting just opposite, seemed to me to turn a shade paler, and the long, white fingers which held his cigarette were certainly shaking.

"We have all been heavy losers to-night, I believe, except M. d'Aubron," he continued. "That is so, is it not?"

There was a vigorous assent from Mr. Brown, and a slight, weary nod from Mr. Carlyon. M. d'Aubron shrugged his shoulders uneasily.

"*La fortune de la guerre*," he remarked, with an attempt at levity in his tone. "Your turn to-day—mine to-morrow."

"I think not," M. de Feurget replied quietly.

M. d'Aubron looked up quickly, and turned a frowning face toward his host.

"I do not quite understand that remark, monsieur," he said haughtily.

M. de Feurget shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"No? I will endeavor to explain it, then. One might play with you, M. d'Aubron, for a very considerable time—with these cards—and the fortune of war, as you call it, would not change."

M. d'Aubron maintained his composure admirably, but he was very pale. Mr. Brown and Mr. Carlyon had drawn a little nearer to the table and were listening with bated breaths.

"At the risk of your finding me very dull, monsieur, I must still confess that I fail to understand you," M. d'Aubron declared in a clear, unshaken tone.

"I will be still more explicit, then," was the calm reply. "It is necessary! You hold, I believe, Mr. Carlyon's I. O. U.s for forty-eight thousand francs and Mr. Brown's for nearly six thousand."

"I do not remember the amounts; but if I do, what of it? How does it concern you?"

"You also claim to have won from me to-night," M. de Feurget continued, disregarding the interruption, "about four thousand francs, of which I have given you a memorandum. I have to request you to tear those documents up at once."

An electric start of surprise ran through the little circle. M. d'Aubron rose from his chair livid with rage.

"M. de Feurget," he exclaimed in a low tone, shaking with passion, "if this is a joke on your part you are carrying it a little too far, let me tell you. What the devil do you mean to insinuate?"

"Nothing. I mean to insinuate nothing," was the quiet reply. "I prefer a plainer mode of making myself understood both by you and by your victims. These cards which I hold in my hand, brought here so kindly by you in case I might be ill-provided, are marked

cards, every one of them! You are a swindler, and you know it!"

An awful spasm passed across M. d'Aubron's face, and the coldness of demeanor which he had hitherto preserved left him suddenly.

"It's a d—d lie!" he cried in a low, choking tone. "It's a conspiracy between you three to get out of paying your debts. Give me the cards."

He stretched out his hand, but M. de Feurget shook his head and passed them quickly behind his back to Mr. Brown.

"Mr. Brown," he said, "be so good as to examine the pattern on the back of these cards on the top right-hand corner."

Mr. Brown and Mr. Carlyon both bent eagerly over them.

"They are most certainly marked," the former declared, his voice shaking with excitement. "The suit and quality of the card are reproduced in miniature among the pattern. The idea is ingenious, but most palpable."

"And if they are, how dare you suppose that I know anything about it?" M. d'Aubron exclaimed, making great efforts to assume a dignified position. "The cards have been changed—very likely by one of you," he added insolently.

M. de Feurget rose from his chair quite calm, and pointed to the door.

"In the face of your winnings, M. d'Aubron, and—forgive me—your past reputation, any doubt as to your guilt is quite out of the question. You will oblige me by leaving this house and the neighborhood at once. In fact, if you remain in the vicinity another twenty-four hours, to-night's event shall be published in the Casino. Go!"

"I deny what you impute to me altogether, and I stand upon my rights as a nobleman and a gentleman!" M. d'Aubron declared in a low, passionate tone. "Your accusation is an insult, and I demand satisfaction for it!"

"You shall have the satisfaction of being kicked out of this house by my servants if you do not take yourself off at once!" was the quiet reply.

Quick as lightning M. d'Aubron leaned across the table and struck his accuser across the mouth. M. de Feurget, wholly unprepared for the blow, reeled back and nearly fell. But M. d'Aubron's triumph was a short one. He had scarcely recovered his position when Mr. Carlyon, who had leaped up immediately he had seen the threatened blow, quietly knocked him down with a thorough British left-hander.

He rose to his feet slowly and wiped the blood from his mouth.

"Mr. Carlyon, you at least shall answer to me for this," he said.

"When you please," was the fierce reply. "You're a d—d scoundrel, D'Aubron, and a coward, too, to strike a blow like that; but I'll fight you."

M. de Feurget turned suddenly round. "I have changed my mind," he said quickly. "M. d'Aubron, I claim the prior right."

"You shall have it," was the low, stifled reply. "The sooner the better."

M. de Feurget came slowly to the window and looked out.

"I agree with you, M. d'Aubron," he said. "The sooner the better. What do you say to now? The light is only indifferent, it is true, but the disadvantage will be mutual. I can find a quiet spot and provide weapons. Mr. Brown will not object to be your second, I dare say, under the circumstances."

"The present time will suit me admirably," M. d'Aubron answered eagerly. "Will Mr. Brown do me the favor?"

Mr. Brown rose with a dignity for which one could never have given him credit. I looked at him in surprise, scarcely recognizing him.

"I most emphatically decline to be associated with M. d'Aubron in any manner whatever," he answered coldly. "Apart from that, I will be no party in any-

thing so antagonistic to my principles as a duel; and, further, even were I a fighting man I would decline having anything to do in so preposterous an affair as a duel between a gentleman—a man of honor—and a swindler."

There was a momentary silence. M. d'Aubron seemed for a moment to be on the point of striking the speaker. With a great effort, however, he restrained himself, and turned away, shaking with passion.

"It is of no consequence," he said. "I have a friend in St. Marien whom a summons from me would bring here at once. If one of M. de Feurget's servants could take a note from me?"

M. de Feurget bowed.

He addressed the note, and it was despatched.

"In the absence of a second, M. de Feurget," he said, "may I waive the ceremony, and inquire from you what weapons you choose?"

"I am indifferent, but I prefer swords," M. de Feurget declared.

I saw an evil smile light up M. d'Aubron's face as he turned away. Then they all came out together on to the lawn, close to where I stood, so that I held my breath for fear of being discovered, though indeed my hiding-place was secure enough.

"It will be dawn in an hour," M. de Feurget remarked, looking steadily toward the east. "Perhaps it is as well that we have to wait. What do you say, gentlemen, to some coffee? and in the mean time I will ask you to excuse me for a few minutes. I have a letter to write."

There were silent murmurs of assent, and the four men stepped back again into the library.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END: RISEN FROM THE DEAD.

Not for the first time in the world's history it seemed as though one of the fairest spots on earth had been chosen for a scene of blood. Close to the edge of the cliff, and separated from the villa by a thick plantation of pine trees, was a smooth plateau of springy, green turf, shut off on one side by the sea, and only accessible from the grounds by a winding path through the plantation. The freshest of morning breezes was bending the dark tops of the slim, graceful pine trees. It was the most exhilarating period of the whole day. Night had passed away, but morning had barely come.

Standing on the very edge of the cliff, bareheaded, with his white hair flowing in the breeze, stood M. de Feurget. He was in his shirt and trousers only, and he was leaning slightly on a long, bare sword. He looked very unlike a man about to fight for his life; more, indeed, as though he had just come unscathed and triumphant through some fierce ordeal.

Some slight noise which I made in changing my position attracted his notice, and he turned round and saw me.

"Neillson!" he cried. "You here! Has your master returned?" he added eagerly.

I shook my head. "I have but lately come from the hotel, sir," I said. "Nothing has been heard of him."

"Ah!" He turned away from me, and a shade of disappointment passed over his face. I felt that I must speak, if only to arrest the current of his thoughts.

"It's a beautiful sunrise, sir," I remarked, scarcely knowing what I said.

"Ay, Neillson, it is," he answered. "A beautiful sunrise. I shall see it set from another world, please God," he added softly.

"You are going to fight a duel, sir?"

"I am. A duel to the death," he said, smiling.

"Fetch my coat here, Neillson," he went on. "That's right. Feel in that pocket and take out a letter."

I did so. It was addressed to my master.

"Neillson, when I am dead, as I shall be when the sun comes up from behind those clouds, I lay a charge upon you—a solemn charge. You must find your master—I care not where he is—you must find him, and give him that letter. Do you promise?"

"I promise," I answered faintly. But——"

"Nay, no buts," he interrupted. "You would have me take courage, but let me tell you this, Neillson—no bridegroom on the eve of his marriage ever longed for the morrow as I long for death. I have lived in the knowledge of such guilt as the most hardened criminal on earth might have shrunk from confessing. My existence has been a lie and a living death. D'Aubron's sword will end it, and I shall escape at last."

There was a click of the little wicket gate leading from the plantation, and Mr. Carlyon and Mr. Brown appeared, followed at a little distance by M. d'Aubron and a stranger. Just as they reached us M. d'Aubron touched Mr. Carlyon on the shoulder.

"Permit me to introduce my friend, Mr. Vachey—Mr. Vachey, Mr. Carlyon."

The slightest of recognitions passed between the two men.

The two seconds withdrew to a little distance, where their conversation did not reach me. But it was very brief, and distinguished on Mr. Carlyon's side by the most icy politeness. In a very few minutes the preliminaries were over, and the two men were standing face to face on guard. Then the signal was given. For about a quarter of an hour it seemed to me that M. de Feurget had all the advantage. Then he seemed suddenly to tire and to fence less vigorously and scarcely to attempt a single repass. M. d'Aubron grew less cautious, and very nearly paid the penalty with his life. As it was he was slightly wounded by a deadly thrust in tierce which he only half parried, and was compelled to rest for a moment.

When they recommenced, M. de Feurget appeared for the first time to put forth all his powers. A dozen times he held his opponent's life in his hands by the success of some brilliant feint which M. d'Aubron utterly failed to parry, but on each occasion he lowered his sword without doing any serious mischief. The end seemed to all of us assured, and I began to think of his prophecy with a smile. Suddenly there came an interruption. The intense, almost breathless, stillness was broken by the sound of quick, hurrying footsteps through the plantation, and we all turned to look. With his hand upon the gate stood my master, pale and travel-stained, and by his side was a tall, white-haired woman, of stately carriage, and dressed in the long, plain robe of a Sister of Mercy. I looked at her for a moment, and then a great cry burst from my lips. Was I dreaming, or had this woman risen up from the dead? Surely this was Cecile d'Augerville. She whom my master had loved and married. She on whose fair, white arm he had clasped the bracelet. She whose hideous fate was ever before me, the victim of that murder which it was sure madness for me to think upon.

An awful cry rang out to the still morning sky, and I saw her throw up her arms in horror. I followed her rapt gaze and I saw at once what had happened. Lying on the ground, supported in Mr. Carlyon's arms, was M. de Feurget, with his adversary's rapier through his lungs.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DUEL ON THE CLIFFS.

I SAW M. d'Aubron withdraw his quivering sword from his opponent's body and wipe it with devilish coolness upon the grass. I saw the wounded man's eyes fixed with a glazed, horrible intensity upon the tall, black-robed woman—ghost I thought her then—

at the wicket gate. And, finally, I saw her move swiftly forward over the smooth turf, and, bending over him, gaze anxiously into his convulsed face.

She would have taken his hand, but he dragged it away from her with a low, moaning cry. Most fearful to witness was the frantic horror with which he shrank back from the pale, pitying face so close to his.

"Marie!" he cried. "Oh, my God, spare me this! I am dying, I tell you! Oh, let me be! Away! Away!"

He held out his hands feebly, as though to shut out the sight of her. With a look of wonder in her calm face, she sank on her knees by his side and whispered softly to him—yet not so softly but that my quickened hearing caught the sound of her clear tone.

"Victor! Victor! Don't you know me? It is not Marie! It is I, her sister, Cecile."

He looked at her half doubtfully, but in a moment or two he was convinced.

"I thought that you were dead," he whispered.

"Dead to the world, Victor! Dead to all former ties. Yet, as you see, in the flesh, alive. I have come from a seclusion which I had hoped never to have left to undertake a mournful task."

A great relief crept slowly into his face. He drew a long breath and tried to raise himself a little. I approached and, kneeling down, supported him in my arms.

"Heaven has sent you both here," he said in a firmer tone. "I am thankful! Stand here by my side and listen. I am crossing the threshold of death, and I have an awful confession to make."

"I have come to hear it, Victor," she answered. "All is blank mystery to us now. You must clear it up."

"God give me strength!" he prayed. Then he glanced around, but it was needless. The others had left us, and we four were alone.

"My time is short," he went on, speaking with difficulty in a hoarse, broken undertone. "Listen, all of you. Ay, come close to me—as close as you will.

You will shrink far enough away presently. The people round here, what is it they call me? Pious, good, benevolent! Ah, the hypocrisy of it. Listen; I am the blackest sinner upon God's earth!

"Cecile, you know how I loved your sister. It was the one great overmastering passion of my life. For her sake I gave up my dreams of the Church. To win her love I renounced without a single regret the calling which before had seemed to me the only means of attaining to earthly happiness. I became her blind slave, a hanger-on, a parasite at her father's house, a sharer, although an unwilling one, in pastimes and scenes which before I had looked upon only with scorn. And with what did she repay me? With her love? Alas, no! She married me, it is true, but it was a sorry compact. In less than a week my happiness was blasted forever. To you, Cecile, her sister, I say nothing of the early days of our wedded life. I will only say that we were not happy, and before what we called our honeymoon was over I had discovered her secret. She never loved me. Worse than that, she loved some one else. She loved your father, Lord Alceston—she had always loved him—and she was a woman who knew how to love. She had married me merely because she was homeless and I was rich. I was a cipher only in her eyes—rather hateful to her than otherwise. At the end of the year she told me that she could live with me no longer, and we separated.

"It broke my heart; but I crept into solitude, and hid my grief from the world. I sent Marie, our daughter, to a convent school, and I lived here alone, fighting with my trouble and seeking to ease it by lightening the sorrows of others. Year after year passed away, and premature middle age stole upon me before my time. My heavy burden of grief grew no less—still I endured. At regular intervals I heard of your sister, Cecile. Think of me as meanly as you like, Cecile; I had her watched by private agents, and so keenly that her slightest action I knew of. By acci-

dent, one day she discovered it, and from that time she refused to touch one penny of my money. She kept her word, and from that time she supported herself.

"Even then I continued to help her, although indirectly, and unknown to her, and I continued also to have her watched, for I could not bear the thought that she might have to struggle against sickness or want. I heard of her visit to you, Cecile, and when she returned to Paris, alas! that visit had suggested a fatal idea to her. She heard from you that the Earl of Alceston believed you dead and had married again. Then she planned a wicked thing, for which, God knows, she paid an awful penalty.

"I knew—I always knew, alas!—that Marie had loved your father, Lord Alceston. When he preferred you, Cecile, that love changed into another feeling. How far Lord Alceston was to blame, I cannot tell. But Marie must have believed herself injured, or she would never have nursed her feelings through so many years and then concentrated them in an ill-fated scheme for revenge. She had a bracelet made like yours, Cecile. She took humble lodgings in London, and one night she sent him a note telling him that his wife, Cecile, lived, and bidding him go to her at once. I knew this, for I had followed her to London with the one hope of saving her honor and myself from shame. I had taken my daughter with me in the last despairing hope that the sight of her child, whom she had never seen since babyhood, might soften her. Alas! Alas! Alas!"

Suddenly there was a rush of blood from his mouth and he fell back ghastly pale, with the agony of death written in his pallid features and luminous eyes. Almost at the same moment the wicket gate opened and a doctor and the village priest in his long robes appeared. The former hurried up, and, dropping on his knee, made a hasty examination, but he shook his head almost immediately.

"Hemorrhage has set in," he pronounced. "M.

de Feurget, I can do nothing for you. Alas! you have but a few minutes to live!"

He stood back, and the village priest took his place. A breath of fresh morning air swept softly across the little plateau. It seemed to revive him. The stream of blood had ceased, and he motioned to us to raise him a little.

"God give me strength to finish," he prayed. "Father, stand by my side. You have heard my confession; you have seen my agony! You know all. Come nearer, Lord Alceston. I can only whisper.

"It was at night I went to see her. For two days I had lingered about the door, lacking the courage to go in and plead with her. I went with pity and love in my heart. I went to make one last appeal; to tell her of our child, and to save her from shame. My old love, which had lived always with me, was still as strong as ever. I would have done anything in the world she had asked. I only wanted her back again, cruelly though she had used me.

"Oh, my God! my God!" he moaned. "It was a cruel thing to send me there that one night of all others and at that hour. I met him—your father, Lord Alceston—coming away from the house. How I kept my hands from him then I cannot tell. But I did. I let him pass without word or sign. I went to her. It was cruel how she received me. She never wished to look upon my face again, she said. She hated me. She hated our child. She would not hear me speak. She bade me go. In less than five minutes I left the house a raving madman. I followed Lord Alceston home. I saw him enter the house by a private door, and in his haste he left the key outside. I took it, and in a few minutes I followed him softly.

"I was in a great, dimly-lit room lined with books—his library; but it was empty. I walked restlessly up and down, waiting for him; but he did not come. In an evil moment my attention was attracted by a long row of curious, gleaming daggers in a dark oak cabinet. From the moment my eyes fell upon the bright

steel I became a devil. I felt the desire to kill spring up within me. From that moment I was a murderer."

A low moan seemed to creep from Lord Alceston's lips, and I saw the woman by his side shudder with a horror too deep for expression. But neither interrupted him by any articulate word.

"If ever man in the world was mad I was mad then. I listened. From another part of the house I could hear the strains of music and the sound of many voices. But there was no one near—no one at hand to disturb me.

"I took one of the daggers—the one with the bluest steel and the sharpest point I could find. Then I let myself out of the room by the private door and carefully pocketed the key. I rushed away. I bought a disguise at a low rag-shop on the way. The cunning of the devil seemed to come to me. I got an empty room next to hers, and when the house was silent I stole in to her. I killed her! I killed her, with her beautiful face flashing its hatred at me—with the mocking, scornful words still upon her lips! Then I hurried from the house back to Grosvenor Square. The thirst for blood was upon me. A maniacal fury seemed to burn in my veins. I stole again into the dimly-lit library. Still it was empty. But I waited.

"Toward morning he came. I heard his slow footsteps outside, and I hid myself. I watched him sit down at his desk, and I planned to myself how I would kill him. I meant to strangle him; but as I crept out from my hiding-place I made some slight noise. He started and looked round. I just managed to escape observation, and while he was ringing for his servant, I slipped behind the screen and out into the passage.

"Through the keyhole I watched you, Neillson, arrive. I saw you search the room. I heard Lord Alceston decide that it must have been his fancy. He settled down to write again, and soon with added caution I stole into the room. I drew another dagger from the case, and, God help me, I killed him!

"I rushed out into the street, with his death-cry

ringing in my ears. At the first breath of cold air sanity began to return. The instinct of self-preservation came upon me, and I turned and fled. I went to Dover and came back again, half-determined to give myself up. Then my senses slowly returned and I knew what I had done! I thought of my daughter, and for her sake I held my peace. Still I was reckless. On the pretence of identifying her I looked once more into my wife's face, and unknown, unrecognized, I followed her to the grave. Then we came back here, and my tortures commenced. Day by day I lived in a very hell of remorse and agony. Another man was suspected! If he should be arrested I must give myself up. Marie would know all—would know that her father was a murderer! Such a murderer! The anguish I have suffered no words of mine could depict. Hell can offer no greater torment than earth has punished me with. And now she will know! Marie will know! She will hate her father! She will loathe his memory forever! Oh, Death, come to me quickly, or I shall die a raving madman!"

It was an awful moment—an awful sight to look upon. A dying man fighting for his last breath with such words upon his lips! Strong though he was, my master was shaking in every limb with emotion, and the black-robed woman who stood by his side had turned a little away with her face hidden in her hands, as though the sight were too terrible for her. The priest, with trembling fingers, drew out a cross from his robe and held it before the eyes of the dying man, but he pushed him almost roughly away.

"Lord Alceston!" he cried.

There was no answer. I saw my master shrink away, compassion struggling in vain with horror in his white face.

"Lord Alceston, come nearer. In a few minutes I shall stand before another Judge to answer for my crime. I do not ask forgiveness. But Marie! She will know all! She will curse my memory! I shall have robbed her of you, the man she loved! Ah!"

We followed his outstretched trembling fingers. At the gate, loosely clad in a plain white dressing-gown, with her long hair streaming in the breeze, stood Marie. She was gazing at us as though petrified with horror, clinging with one arm to a slender pine tree for support, and with the other pressed against her forehead.

"My father! My father!" she cried, the words at last bursting from her frozen lips. "What is the matter? What has happened? Is he ill? Can none of you tell me?"

She looked toward us each in turn. None of us could speak. With trembling fingers she strove to open the postern. The dying man shivered all over and covered his face with his hands.

I glanced toward my master. His face was deadly pale, and his lips were moving as though in prayer. Suddenly he stooped down.

"Look up," he whispered, "and bid your daughter farewell. She shall think of you always as she does now. As her husband I swear it. You alone shall answer for your sins; and may God have mercy upon you!"

Like magic was the effect of the hoarse whispered words. Again the light leaped into the dying man's eyes and peace shone in his softened face. The priest again held the cross before his eyes, and this time he nodded and smiled faintly. One hand Marie grasped and carried it to her lips, where the hot, scalding tears fell fast upon it; the other Lord Alceston took and held in his own.

A moment's deep stillness and it was over. As suddenly as it had come the light died out of his fast-dimmed eyes and the smile slowly faded from his lips. But the peace remained.

THE END.

SPLENDIDLY ILLUSTRATED.

SOCIO-POLITICAL NOVEL OF AMERICAN LIFE.

NOW READY, PRICE 50 CENTS,

Dollarocracy

AN ANONYMOUS

AMERICAN STORY.

MESSRS. JOHN A. TAYLOR & CO. are gratified to be able to announce their acquisition of the sole right to publish the above-named semi-satirical novel, the work of a practised but (for the nonce) anonymous author.

"Dollarocracy" is the story of a typical American. The hero illustrates in his own person the unique qualities and see-saw experiences of our ambitious public men. He is encircled by troops of friends, flatterers and foes, in society, in politics and in the press. The portraiture and the ever-varying play of these characters around the central figure make up a comedy-drama of daily life as sparkling and faithful as anything now current in fiction or on the stage.

Copyright and Published Exclusively in

THE "BROADWAY SERIES,"

BY

JOHN A. TAYLOR & CO.,

119 POTTER BUILDING, NEW YORK.

MAYFLOWER LIBRARY

No. 4

PRICE 30 CENTS

MAR 5. 1892

THE PEER AND THE WOMAN

BY

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
COPYRIGHT
FEB 1892

NEW YORK
JOHN A. TAYLOR & COMPANY
119 POTTER BUILDING

February, 1892. Issued Monthly. Annual Subscription, $3.00.
Entered at the New York Post Office as Second Class Matter.

JOHN A. TAYLOR & CO.,

PUBLISHERS,

119 POTTER BUILDING, NEW YORK,

BEG TO ANNOUNCE THE FOLLOWING

NEW COPYRIGHT NOVELS

IN THEIR

MAYFLOWER LIBRARY.

JUST PUBLISHED:

No. 3. ONE TOUCH OF NATURE.

By MARGARET LEE, author of "Divorce," "A Brooklyn Bachelor," etc.

No. 4. THE PEER AND THE WOMAN.

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM.

RECENT ISSUES:

No. 1. WELL WON.

By Mrs. ALEXANDER, author of "The Wooing O't," etc. Her most successful recent book.

No. 2. BACK TO LIFE.

By T. W. SPEIGHT.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS ON "WELL WON."

"A clever and merry little story. The movement is as rapid as that of a comedietta."—*New York Herald.*

"A capital domestic comedy."—*New York Commercial Advertiser.*

"An interesting story delightfully told."—*San Francisco News-Letter.*

"This little romance will find plenty of admirers."—*Pittsburg Bulletin.*

"The story is wholesome and well flavored."—*Minneapolis Tribune.*

"The book is laid down with a sigh of regret that the end has been reached."—*Godey's Lady's Book.*

Readers and dealers are respectfully reminded that our books, being copyright, are not published in any other edition. Price 30c. each.

JOHN A. TAYLOR & CO.,

119 POTTER BUILDING, - - - NEW YORK.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
00021631784